BERKELY MATHER: NEW STORY

ARGOSY

MARCH, 1958

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THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

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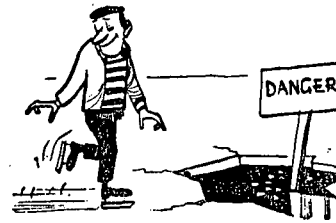
Cavort on skis

Fall on their noggins
Out of toboggans

Or go to Paradise
Via very thin ice



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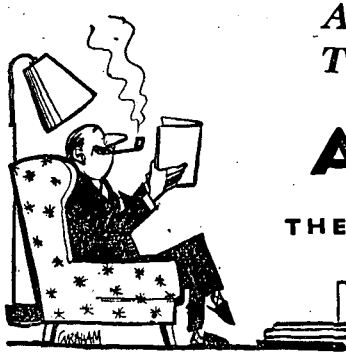

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ARGOSY

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BERKELY MATHER

GETTING THERE FAST

"WHEN I first came out of the army," said Berkely Mather, "I decided that the best way to deal with the strange, exciting, rather bewildering new career of writing was to subject myself to strict army discipline. Up at six, saw logs or dig till breakfast, report to typewriter at eight-forty-five, write till coffee-break at eleven, one hour for lunch, work till six, bath, drink, dinner, then two or three hours' more work."

He paused, considered this imposing programme, burst into an irrepressible fit of laughter, and added, "It lasted three days."

Now he writes when he must, if a deadline is catching up on him. "But my wife is a wonderful sergeant-major." Since he's at present finishing a book—his first full-length thriller incidentally—has two sets of articles for national dailies to be dashed off, not to mention a couple of long complete stories, keeping up with his deadlines is no mean feat. He has never been late yet, he says proudly.

Berkely Mather is short, wiry, tweedy, and has a personality that says "Army," from moustache to whipcords.

Hardly surprising—in real life he is ex-Royal Artillery Colonel Davies. Youngest in a family of seven, he had a fondness for romancing from an early age, which repeated wallopings by his father and elder brothers did

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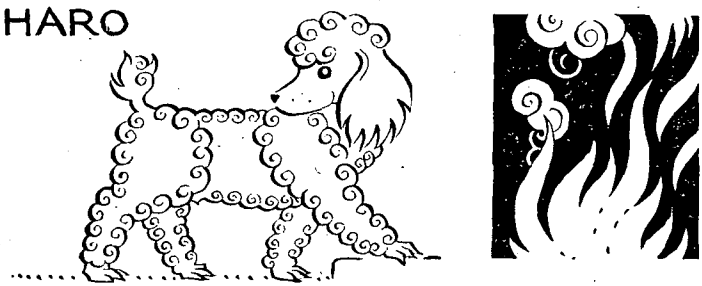
nothing to discourage. At twenty-one he set off round the world in a tramp steamer with a hundred pounds in his pocket. Then he joined the army, so as to see India.

In 1939, just after he was married, he saw an advertisement in *The Times of India*, asking for short stories. Why not write one? He bought a typewriter, tapped out a story with one finger, and sent it off. The advertiser was editor of a new glossy monthly, and promptly commissioned one story a month from Davies, all to be written under different names. " Berkely Mather " was his favourite of these, taken from the name of a grill in Poona. When six stories had been written and published, war broke out and put an end to his writing for fourteen years.

After serving in the Middle East, Burma, Hongkong, and Middle East again, he was sent to England and, while stationed at Barnard Castle, happened to hear a radio play. " I could do better than that," he said. " Why don't you? ", said his wife. He wrote a radio play, and sent it to the B.B.C. Next, having never seen T.V., he hired a set for the mess, wrote a T.V. play, sent it off . . . Both plays were accepted and produced within a week of one another, in 1954.

Recently retired from the army, he lives with his wife and, in the holidays, two teenage sons in a large comfortable house in Sussex. The family love huge open fires and have one at each end of the sitting-room. Simon the poodle chases his tail midway between the fires, under a green Venetian scene by one of Canaletto's pupils, and there's an electric railway in the attic for the boys.

In working hours Berkely Mather sits in a tiny room (so that he won't be tempted to get up and walk about,) with nothing in it but a chair, table, typewriter, and masses of paper. He feels like a hen in a battery, but it's the best way to get work done. He writes straight on to the typewriter—" If only I could use a tape-recorder, but I have to see the words "—and at phenomenal



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speed. He has done ten thousand words a day, written a play in two nine-hour sessions.

Out of working hours Colonel Davies likes to cook a curry for a friend—he has dozens—often goes sailing at Pevensey or Chichester, about once a week hooshes up to London in his Mercedes-Benz for a rehearsal or script-conference. He watches his own plays on T.V. but this is a duty, not a pleasure—he is always in agony lest something should go wrong. When once a player did totally forget his lines the irate author was on the telephone to the studio before the play had finished—but learnt the actor was suffering from Asian flu and forgave him.

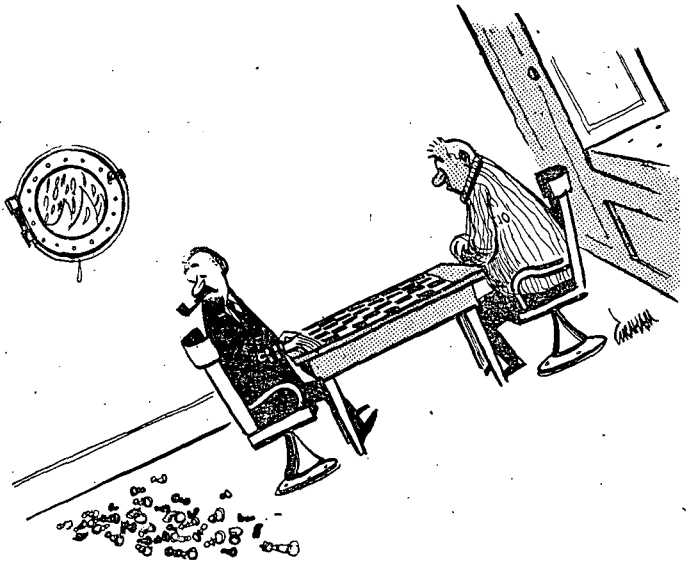
Later on he's going to try writing for boys, probably under a different name. He gets indignant sometimes at the thought that maybe his current work is being bought not on its own merits but on the strength of past successes. We felt that was a needless worry.

He can't abide ladies in jeans, crooners with fake accents, people who say, " Oh, do you write for T.V.? We haven't a set . . ."

The only thing lacking in his life at the moment is a scooter. Australian to the backbone, he feels it's not worth getting out the car for the five hundred yards to the local.

JOHN SILVER

Horatio



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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

AMATEUR DETECTIVE

The whole thing added up to a certainty

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

THE gelignite gang, who made such a nuisance of themselves that year, were known as the Players. Detective Sergeant Petrella was present on the hot summer morning when they were christened.

Their first victim was Solly Moss, the bookmaker, who always opened his own office. Solly smelt disaster even before his eyes had taken in the tormented mess of metal which had once been a safe, mixed with the shreds of the two expensive carpets which had been wrapped round it to deaden the noise.

" They're no shentlemen," said the outraged Solly to Superintendent Haxtell, who, with Petrella, came post-haste. " No shentlemen at all."

" In that case," said Haxtell, whose mind was at Lords, " we must call them the Players."

And " Players " they remained, until the day when their real names came to be known to the police. This did not happen until some nine months later, and but for two mistakes made by Constable Wilmot, it is possible that it would never have come to pass at all.

At five minutes to four on a raw morning, soon after the turn of the year, Wilmot was standing in front of the statue of Alderman Brassey at the corner of Newton Street and Endless Street. By Police Routine Instructions, a copy of which he carried in his pocket, he was meant to be, " . . . testing doors and windows for loose fastenings, keeping an eye open for signs of breaking and entering, and watching for vagrants and persons without visible means of support."

He was doing none of these things.

If Ernie Wilmot had not been a policeman, it seems probable

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that he would have been some sort of criminal. For Ernie was independent, impertinent, an enemy of authority, and a disliker of regular work.

The only subject he had excelled in at school was boxing. When he had announced that he was going to be a policeman, his family had scoffed. But Ernie had stuck to his guns. He was short of the regulation height, but somehow, by taking thought or by taking exercise, he had added the necessary cubit to his stature.

He had arrived in Q Division with a big question-mark on his record, the result of certain differences of opinion with his previous Section Sergeant who had been a stickler for such things as punctuality and standing orders.

In his new Division he had not started too badly. Sergeant Newdigate, who now had him in hand, had summed him up correctly to Superintendent Haxtell.

"He'll never be much good as a constable," he said. "Too bolshie. But he might make a detective."

"Thank you, Sergeant," said Haxtell, who was himself a detective.

"You know what I mean, sir. Detail, and smartness. That's what brings a man on in the uniformed branch. But Wilmot's got plenty of savvy. Not afraid to act on his own, is our Ernie."

"Did he tell you he wanted to be a detective?"

"Dreams about it," said Sergeant Newdigate.

Wilmot was dreaming at that moment. After months of careful research—dressed sometimes as a Lascar, sometimes as a Salvation Army officer—he was on the point of rounding up the largest drug-running outfit in the East End. So dangerous and so difficult was the assignment, that he was allowed to carry a gun. "Wilmot's got a cool head," said the Assistant Commissioner. "He won't draw it unless he has to."

There were footsteps in the distance. It took Wilmot a few seconds to realize that they came out of reality, and not out of his splendid vision.

The footsteps stopped.

Wilmot looked guiltily at the Town Hall clock. He had stood there a lot longer than he ought to have done. He was already three minutes late for the "point" where he was to meet Sergeant Newdigate. Indeed, in the sudden silence, he fancied he could hear, three streets away, the well-known footfall of the Sergeant approaching their appointed meeting-place.

Then the first lot of footsteps started again. They were lighter and quicker than the Sergeant's, and they suggested a much younger man. Also, whereas before they had been going away, at

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a moderate pace, they were now coming back towards where he stood, and very fast indeed.

To Wilmot this circumstance seemed all at once suspicious. That a citizen should be abroad at all at that hour was a fact that needed explanation. Why he should stop, turn round in his tracks, and hurry back because he heard the footsteps of authority ahead of him was a question that needed answering. Wilmot decided to stay exactly where he was, and await developments.

The man ahead of him had slowed down a little. Now he rounded the corner and came into sight under the pale street lamps, walking briskly.

Wilmot saw a man on the right side of thirty, with fair hair, crew-cut in the American style. He was wearing a belted raincoat and he was carrying—Wilmot's eyes flew to it as the needle to the magnetic pole—a small, battered suitcase. And it swung from his right hand as if it weighed a ton.

The fair-haired man paused and, by the cock of his head, seemed to be listening. In the distance the beat of Sergeant Newdigate's size-twelve boots, supporting Sergeant Newdigate's sixteen-stone frame, receded. The man seemed to relax. He shifted his hand to get a better grip on the bag, and started off down the pavement. This course brought him within a yard of where Wilmot was standing, outwardly impassive, inwardly wildly excited, beneath the shadow of Alderman Brassey.

" Good morning, sir," said Wilmot.

The man stopped, and looked across. For a moment, he appeared disconcerted. Alarmed would have been too strong a word. Then he said, " Oh, it's you, is it? You trying to give me heart failure? "

" Going anywhere in particular? "

" Of course I'm going somewhere. I'm going to work."

" Work? "

" Why not? " said the man. " Some people do work."

" Would you mind if I took a look at what you've got in that bag? "

" I don't see any reason why you shouldn't," said the man, " but equally, I don't see any real reason why you should."

" Then I must ask for your name and address."

The man turned the matter over in his mind. He seemed to be debating it on its merits. If he had been a little more worried, Wilmot would have been a lot happier.

" Partridge," he said at last. " It was my father's name, too."

" And address? "

" 22, Brown Street. I live on the top floor."

" And you still won't open that case? "

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"What a glutton you are," said the man. "You've got my name and address. What more do you want? All right. If I open it, will you let me get on? I'm late on the job already."

"Provided I'm satisfied," said Wilmot cautiously.

The man placed the case on the pedestal at Alderman Brassey's feet, and clicked open the twin catches. The lid flew up, and Wilmot found himself looking at as neat a little lock-breaking kit as he had ever seen. The largest single item was a high-speed electric drill, wired, as Wilmot noted, to plug into an ordinary lamp socket. A tray of bits and diamond-tipped cutting-tools. Three useful looking cold chisels. A set of metal saws. And, wrapped in a screw of rag in one corner, the bright and cunningly-shaped ends of a pretty little set of picklocks.

"Now if you're happy," said the man, "perhaps I can go on with my job?"

"I'm afraid," said Wilmot thickly, and in a voice that he hardly recognized as his own, "that I must ask you to accompany me to the station."

"Can't be done," said the man. "I'm late already."

"In that case—" Wilmot took a resolute step forward.

"Look here. You're worried about what's in that case, is that it? It didn't occur to me before, but I suppose it must look a bit fishy if you don't know. I work for Charings. You know—the Safe people."

Even Wilmot had heard of Charings.

"Why'd you be going to work at four o'clock in the morning?"

"I don't. Not usually. This is a special job. Some bloke's locked his door and can't get it open. I'm on early duty. We take it in turns. Job like this comes up any time this week, they phone for me. The works' manager fixes it. I meet him outside the factory, and we go straight to the job. I got my kit with me."

Wilmot said, "You got your kit with you, all right. Perhaps you wouldn't mind stepping round to the station, and just checking up. We can do it by telephone."

"*I* don't mind," said the fair-haired man. "It's the works' manager who's going to start blowing his top."

"We'll chance that," said Wilmot stolidly.

They walked back to the station in silence. It took them twenty minutes to get there.

Mr. Partridge obliged with the telephone number of Charings, and Wilmot dialled it.

"You're sure it's right?" he said. "I don't seem to be getting any answer."

"Of course you won't get any answer," said Mr. Partridge. "Night calls on that number go straight through to the works'

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manager's bedroom. He won't be there. I told you. He's in his car, outside the factory, waiting for me to turn up. And I don't mind betting that he's in a fair old temper. I'm nearly three-quarters of an hour late already."

There was a disturbing ring of truth in his voice.

Wilmot considered the matter. Then he said, "All right. You stay here with the Station Sergeant. It won't take me five minutes on my bike to get round to Charings—"

"If the gaffer's in the sort of temper I expect he is by now," said Mr. Partridge, "you'll get back quicker than that."

"I've just had the Northern Heights Dairies on the telephone," said Chief Superintendent Richmond. "It was their depot that Partridge was meant to open. The lock on the main door had jammed. Apparently we held him up for over an hour, and half North London went without milk for breakfast."

"I heard about that," said Haxtell. "I can't say that I entirely blame Wilmot. If I'd found a man walking through the streets at four in the morning with a safe-breaking outfit, I'd have arrested him."

"No, you wouldn't," said Richmond. "You'd have gone straight with him to the factory and checked up on his story."

Haxtell considered. "That factory," he said, "is in the opposite direction from the station. Suppose Wilmot had agreed to go with him, and halfway there the man had cut and run? And suppose the man had turned out to be one of our gelignite kings? What would have happened to Wilmot then?"

"Junior Police Constables are always wrong, whatever they do," said Richmond. "All right, I agree with you. No censure for Wilmot. By the way, I believe his one ambition is to be a detective. What about it? He could have a run—unofficially, of course—with your people. Then if he makes out, I'll recommend him for transfer."

"Hm," said Haxtell. The offer of anyone to help out the sorely-tried detective forces was welcome. But there was a string to it. If Wilmot became a detective, he would become his responsibility, not Richmond's. None the less, on the few occasions when he had spoken to Wilmot, he had liked him. And there were possibilities latent in his pert self-confidence.

"I'll tell Petrella to keep an eye on him," he said. "A month's trial."

From then on, Wilmot led a double life, doing duty by day, for the uniformed branch was not so overstaffed that it could dispense with his services at the wave of a hand; and accompanying Detective Sergeant Petrella through long evenings when that

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hard-working young man did what he called his homework.

He was initiated into the mysteries of that half world of street corners and coffee shops and rooms above public houses where detectives meet and talk with contacts and informers and spies: men and women of all types and occupations, some motivated by self-importance, some by spite, and many working simply for money.

Petrella soon found Wilmot useful. He was new to the district. Even those who had seen him before had probably seen him in uniform, under that peculiar anonymity which a police helmet confers. When they met him again, in dirty flannel trousers and a windcheater, with hair of most unregulation length, they might be forgiven for failing to recognize the solemn young man whose white-gloved hand had waved their car on that morning.

A lot of work was directed quietly towards the Players who, through the autumn and winter, had waxed bold and proud, with the pride that comes from immunity and success.

"They're a tight little bunch, that lot," said Petrella. "They must be, or we'd have broken in on them a long time ago. No women; no hangers-on. No loose ends."

"What about the fences?" said Wilmot.

"Mostly, they take money. You don't need receivers for money. You just spend it."

"That's right, you do," said Wilmot. They were sitting in the back room of a canal-side pub, waiting for one of Petrella's contacts to turn up.

"We don't know who they are, but we know quite a lot about them. There are three of them. They've never left a fingerprint behind, but their trade mark is on every job. One is an explosives expert. He handles the stuff like a master. Just enough, in just the right place to do the job. Number two attends to locks. Number three, I think, is the boss and contact man. He finds out where the money's kept, and very rarely makes a mistake."

"This explosives man," said Wilmot. "Where'd he learn about it? It doesn't get taught in school."

"He might have been a sapper, in one of the specialized branches. Or worked in a mine, or a quarry. Any place where he'd have the handling of gelignite."

"And where's he keep it?"

"Under his bed," said Petrella. "Polar ammon gelignite's absolutely safe—by itself. It needs a detonator to set it off."

At this point the contact turned up—a large woman with a dropsical affliction and a grudge against society—and the subject was abandoned; but Wilmot went on thinking about it. He was not unappreciative of the trouble that Petrella was taking over

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him, and would have liked to do something for him in return. He started, in a modest way, cultivating contacts of his own. Most of them were quite useless, and he had the wit to see that they would promise anything for money, and accomplish nothing.

Highside had no proper Section House accommodation and Wilmot was in lodgings, occupying an attic at the top of a tall house in Crown Road. He had not a lot of time to spare on other boarders. The most friendly of them was a cheerful little insurance salesman called Harry Grumbard, who occupied, by virtue of his wealth and station, two rooms on the first-floor front.

When Wilmot started looking on his fellow men and women with the eye of a Probationary Detective Constable in search of contacts, it occurred to him that Harry would be an excellent man to start on. So he took him out and stood him a drink.

Harry drank whisky, while Wilmot had got no further than bottled beer, and it might have been an expensive evening, had the guest not quickly turned host.

" Don't give it a thought," he said. " I know just how it is in the pleece. You're all underpaid. My office boy gets more'n you do. It's on me from now on, so drink up and stop worrying."

He soon discovered exactly what Wilmot was after.

" I'd be tickled to death to help you," he said, " and you've come to the right person. I get about a lot in my job. And anything I could do to help put that safe-blowing crowd behind bars, I'd do gladly. I know Solly Moss well. In fact, I was round at his place trying to sell him some insurance about a week before it happened. And Crockford and the Kellaways. They're all friends of mine. And the wicked thing is—" Harry Grumbard signalled for another round of drinks—" that loss of cash is one thing you can't insure against. Did you know that? "

Wilmot said he'd never had any cash to worry about himself, and adjured Harry to keep his eyes wide open. He explained the sort of men they were after. One of them, at least, would have connections with a supply of explosives.

A week later Harry took Wilmot aside.

" I think we're on to it," he said. " It's a shop, in the Lower Marsh. Looks like an ordinary working ironmongers. Keys cut to order, that sort of thing. Run by a man called Bloomfield. Now here's something I got from a friend—I won't give you his name—not a very respectable citizen." Harry lowered his voice to a confidential rumble, " You know what Bloomfield did before he started this shop? Worked in Woolwich Arsenal."

Wilmot thanked his new friend, and retired, with a fast-beating heart, to his room, to think out what looked like the first real break in his life as a criminal investigator.

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One point troubled him. By the rules, such information should be passed on. He knew that well enough. All the best results in police work are obtained by the constant pooling of information; important information, unimportant information, facts, half facts, rumours; until suddenly the whole thing adds up to a certainty. Facts, if you like, said the voice of the tempter, but how can you pass on unfounded suspicions? Do a bit of work on it yourself. Turn the suspicions into something more substantial. Get a bit of credit out of it, too.

Wilmot listened to the voice of the tempter. He had forty-eight hours leave due to him, and it says much for his keenness that he decided to devote the whole of it to keeping a watch on the Bloomfield shop. It would involve night work, so he slept during the day, got up at six o'clock, dressed in an old suit and a raincoat, and set out. The first night's vigil was almost entirely wasted, since he made the mistake of watching the street door. It was when he heard steps going away from the shop at a very late hour that he realized there was a back entrance down the court behind the shop.

Next night was just the night for close observation. A heavy mist had come up with the dusk. Even under the lamps it was difficult to make out faces. In the tiny blind alley behind Bloomfield's shop it was like the nether pit. In a way, it was too dark.

A form loomed up suddenly in the alley. A double knock on the door, which opened briefly, and someone went in. Wilmot, crouched five yards away behind a garbage can, could see nothing. The windows were heavily shuttered. He tested the door lightly, but it was bolted.

Suddenly he became aware that a second man had entered the court; was, indeed, halfway along it, and coming along fast on rubber soles. The friendly garbage can was out of reach. Wilmot dropped on one knee, pressing into the corner, but it was too late. The newcomer had excellent night sight. A torch clicked on, the beam milky in the mist, and then was thrust almost into his face.

"What the devil are you doing here?" said a voice which Wilmot had no difficulty in recognizing. It belonged to Superintendent Haxtell.

"For God's sake," said Haxtell to Petrella, next morning. "Can't I visit my most reliable informer in the whole division, without falling over your protégé? Take him somewhere and explain the facts of life to him."

"Old Bloomfield's been on our pay-roll since the year dot," said Petrella later. "He's the Superintendent's pet information man. How on earth did you get the idea he was a crook?"

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"Someone's been pulling my leg," said Wilmot miserably. He had spent five minutes at attention while Haxtell spoke to him. The rough-tonguing he didn't mind. It was part of the job. The thing which mattered was that his hope of a future in the plain-clothes branch had diminished almost to invisibility.

"Tell me the whole thing," said Petrella patiently.

When Wilmot had finished he said, "So your friend Harry's an insurance agent, is he? And he knew Solly, and the Kellaways who run the soda-water factory. And Crockford, the garage man. Sounds the sort of person I ought to cultivate myself. Where does he drink in the evenings?"

"He's at the Cross Keys, most nights."

"That's a bit public," said Petrella. "Where does he go when he's not at the Cross Keys?"

Wilmot had no idea. He thought he had once seen him come out of the all-night café. He had lost interest in Harry Grumbard.

"Cheer up," said Petrella. "It's darkest before the dawn. I'm going to have a word with old Peggs."

Mr. Peggs, known as Square Peggs to his friends, was the dyspeptic owner of the all-night café. He knew Petrella well, and received him in the kitchen, where he was frying a huge pan of sausages, and sucking a bismuth tablet.

"Lovely grub," he said. "There's nothing like a couple of bangers and a rasher when you're hungry. Can't touch 'em myself, but then I'm peculiar. What can I do for you tonight?"

Petrella explained.

"Don't know him by name," said Peggs. "Then, a lot of people come in here I don't know. I think I've seen him, though. Tubby little party, red-faced, looks pleased with himself. Sometimes shares a table with two other men. He wouldn't be so cheerful if he had my stomach."

"Two other men," said Petrella thoughtfully.

"That's right." Peggs considered. "One medium size, light hair. One big, looks like a soldier. I'll give you a blow if I see 'em. What's wrong?"

"I'm not sure," said Petrella. "It might be nothing at all. Or it might be quite a lot."

A week passed, during which Wilmot went round looking so unhappy that Sergeant Gwilliam suggested to Detective Constable Cobley that he must be in love. Cobley said no, it was probably fallen arches. Most policemen suffered from fallen arches sooner or later. Petrella said nothing. He was waiting for a telephone call.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when it came. Petrella took it, and said to Wilmot, "Come on. This is us." They entered

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the all-night café by the kitchen door and found the proprietor cutting up potato chips with a dangerous-looking guillotine.

"Take a gander through the serving hatch," he said. "See if there's anyone you recognize."

There were three of them. Harry Grumbard he recognized. With him sat a big, solid-looking man with a heavy dragoon moustache and what might, in a previous generation, have been the scar of a sabre-cut down the side of his face; and beyond the heavy dragoon sat a tall, well-built man with light hair cut short.

"Take a look at the party at the corner table," said Petrella.

Wilmot was pressed against him, and he could feel him stiffen.

"But—" he said, "that's—"

"A friend of yours?"

"The stout little party's Harry Grumbard. But I didn't mean him. The other one's—what's his name—Partridge."

"The lock expert?"

"Yes."

"That's two of them," said Petrella. "You know the big one, Pop?"

Peggs applied his eye to the crack in the hatch. "Seen him about before," he said. "Army type. Bomb disposal, I did hear. That's where he got that crease in his face."

"That makes it perfect," said Petrella. "A bomb-disposal man, an insurance salesman, and a lock expert. A plus B plus C, and the answer's seven years apiece, with a bit of luck. Did you see them when they arrived?"

Peggs said they had come in separately and gone straight to the table.

"Did they bring anything with them? A bag or a parcel?"

Peggs thought not. Just their coats.

"Looks as if they're moving too."

"Damn," said Petrella. He thought hard, then said to Wilmot, "Slip out the back way and pick up anyone you can. Cobley, Gwilliam, Mote. I can't tell you where we're going, so you'll have to use your loaf." And to Peggs, "Keep them as long as you can. Short-change them, or something."

Five minutes later Petrella was moving up the dark street, his eye on the three figures ahead. Peggs, he knew, was watching from the doorway, and would follow to the corner and report which way they went. After that it was a matter of luck.

The three men walked confidently and fast, up the high street, off it down the hill under the railway bridge, and up again to Monsell Road where stood blocks of offices, now mostly shut for the night. In the end block a light was still showing in the hall, and the men went through the swing door. Petrella heard

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their feet clattering up the stairs. He hesitated, then followed. If they were going to pick up their gear, it was essential to keep close on their heels.

There were boards in the hall, with names on them. On the third floor was the office of H. GRUMBARD, INSURANCE AGENT.

Simple, really, he reflected, as he climbed the stairs. What better hiding-place than an office? Plenty of opportunity for visitors, and no maids or landladies to poke their noses into places where they weren't wanted. Probably an office cleaner flicked a duster over it once a week.

He stood outside the door and listened. Men were moving something inside the room. And he heard a laugh. That was all he did hear. The next moment the ceiling came down and cracked him on the head, a hot, red curtain of flame rose in front of his eyes, and a roaring filled his ears. When it died down, he opened his eyes, and found himself slumped in an office chair with three men looking at him.

"Turn that desk light up a bit," said Harry Grumbard. "That's right. I thought I knew him, when I spotted him tailing us. He's a Detective Sergeant, from Crown Road."

"Looks young and tender for a bogey," said the heavy dragoon. He was still swinging the long, leather-covered cosh that he had used on Petrella, and there was a far-away, almost dreamy look in his eyes, the look of an executioner as he weighs up his next victim for the trap.

"All on his own, too," said Partridge.

Behind them the safe stood open. Petrella could see, neatly stacked in it, the paper-wrapped four-ounce sticks of polar ammon gelignite, and the bright, screw-capped detonators, with the fuses attached. He was under no illusions as to his position.

"That lift of yours," said the heavy dragoon. "I often told you, Harry boy, it's not safe. Here's a poor young man prowling round in the dark. The grille's been left open. He trips up, loses his balance, and falls three floors—onto the top of his head."

"An accident," agreed the fair-haired man.

"Why do we have to do it here?" said Harry. "This is my office. I don't want any tie-up to my office. We got the whole of Helenwood Common."

Petrella thought that the use of his legs might be coming back to him. If he could get to the door—

"Better lock that door," said the heavy dragoon. He swung his cosh lightly, in a huge hand. Partridge lounged across. Petrella gathered himself together. If nothing else were possible, he would throw something through the window, in the hope of attracting attention

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The fair-haired man had his hand on the door when it opened, and Wilmot came through it. For a moment everyone stood still. Then Wilmot said, with concentrated venom, "Talk your way out of this one," and brought a right hook up from the floor.

It was one of the most beautiful blows Petrella had ever seen. The thud of Partridge's body hitting the floor was drowned in the louder thunder of reinforcements coming up the stairs.

"Very nice," said Sergeant Gwilliam. "Now don't anyone do anything stupid. There are six of us here, and more outside."

"I've got a form here," said Superintendent Haxtell to Petrella, three weeks later, "that I've got to fill in about Wilmot. It's a final recommendation for plain-clothes work. Do you think—?"

"Yes. I do," said Petrella. "If it hadn't been for him striking up an acquaintanceship with Grumbard we should never have got onto him and Partridge and Broad."

"Well—yes," said Haxtell. "I suppose you could put it that way. Would you say he's got the necessary qualifications?"

"Certainly," said Petrella. He saw again that lovely upper-cut, not swung, but lifted as an upper-cut should be, with the whole weight of the shoulder behind it, and that last-minute turn of the wrist which screwed it home. "Every qualification."

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ROAD TO SPRING

One day of unforgotten spring
The old road caught fire,
And the rider climbing the hill that evening
Rode with a whistle gold and clear
Into the flame that hid him there.

The wheat in the paddock by the road
Rustled like a running flare,
And the burning magpie's image-throated mood
Lit and fanned the wind-thrummed wire
That gossiped news across the shire.

Heroic flicker in smoking dust,
The striding ploughman heard
Under the hill, golden where then had passed
The slow blaze of rider and bird,
The song in which he felt assured.

DAVID ROWBOTHAM, *Ploughman and Poet*

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ATTAR OF LOVE

It was strictly a business problem
—so how could green-eyed Lisa solve it?

BY HENRY SLESAR

GARY CLAYPOOL looked like the serious young man he was, a man to whom the virtues of diligence and industry were more than merely subjects for cynicism. He was rising fast in the chemical concern which gave him a two-window office, and there was little doubt that he would go right to the top in the next few years.

Despite his dedicated ambition, he had a sense of humour, too. His eyes could dance, and his lips could curl puckishly. But on his third date with the beautiful green-eyed, black-haired Lisa Monahon, his eyes were foggy and distant, and his mouth drooped downwards.

They went to dinner and the theatre, and ended up in Gary's cosy flat in upper Manhattan for a nightcap. People who turned to look at them during the evening wondered why this well-favoured young man, with such a stunning girl on his arm, should look like the embodiment of Russian melancholy.

Eventually, Lisa asked the question directly. "Gary, is something the matter? You've seemed so unhappy all the evening."

She was sitting on the edge of a foam-rubber sofa, sipping delicately at a weak mixture of brandy-and-soda. Her fur cape was still around her sculptured white shoulders, as if to make it clear that her visit was only a brief one.

"Have I?" Gary said. "I'm awfully sorry, Lisa. Didn't mean you to notice."

"Then there is something wrong. Can you tell me, or is it something you'd rather not talk about?"

"It's not that." He squeezed the glass in his hand and looked moodily into the amber depths. "It's what you might call strictly a business problem. No use bothering you with it."

"I don't suppose I'd be much use," she said wistfully. "But it's a help to talk to someone about it, isn't it?"

"Maybe so. Maybe so," he sighed, and slammed his glass on the marble-topped coffee table. "All I know is, this thing has got me so tied up in knots that I can't sleep or eat or—"

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Her eyes widened. "Well, don't be so mysterious! What is this big problem?"

He stared at her.

"All right. I'll show it to you."

Gary got up from the sofa and walked through the doorway of his bedroom. When he returned, there was a plain, clear-glass bottle in his hand, stopped by a cork. Inside the bottle was a cool blue liquid.

"This is the problem," he said grimly. "This little baby."

"What is it? Some sort of chemical?"

"Some sort is right." He turned it round in his hand. "This is called Formula X-14. Nothing mysterious about the name; it just means that it's the result of the fourteenth experiment made in our laboratory. It came out of some work we're doing for the Ardstein people. You know, the perfumers."

"Of course," Lisa said. "But is that what your company does? Makes perfumes?"

"Not quite. We handle all kinds of chemical problems, and that's what Ardstein brought us a few months ago. I was personally assigned to the project, and all the major decisions land in my lap. That's what got me so worried. I don't know whether to turn this stuff over to Ardstein and collect our fee—or drive up on a dark night and drop it into the river."

"I don't understand," Lisa blinked. "What is the stuff?"

"It's a perfume. That's all it is, a perfume."

"What's wrong with it? Can I smell it?" Her nostrils were twitching curiously.

"Go ahead. It smells just like an ordinary perfume. And it doesn't do any harm in the bottle."

Lisa removed the cork and sniffed. "Smells pretty good. But what do you mean by harm?"

"I mean *harm*," Gary said, taking Formula X-14 from her. "It's the damndest thing I've ever run across, and it's given the company a hell of a problem. You see—" He rubbed a hand over his scalp—"I don't know how to tell you this. But you read the perfume advertisements, don't you?"

"Sometimes."

"Well, you know what they all claim. Soak a little of our stuff on your earlobes, and the men will all be after you."

"So?"

"So that's our problem. Believe me, a big problem. Because this stuff really works that way."

Her beautiful green eyes opened wider still. "What do you mean?"

"I mean exactly that! When this perfume makes contact with

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a woman's skin, it makes her absolutely irresistible to men. So help me! Take any woman at all, add a little Formula X-14, and—well, it's frightening!"

"You're joking!"

"I'm dead serious. We saw the reaction on our experimental animals. Then we made the mistake of trying it on Miss Gower, one of the lab workers. Now, Miss Gower is—well, to be blunt, a kind of homely woman. But two minutes after this stuff went on her, old Funston gave a shriek like a bull elephant and went for her. Old Funston! He's seventy-four years old. But he went ripping and tearing after Miss Gower as if he was a sailor on a one-hour pass. Right in the laboratory, he rips off her blouse."

"How awful!" Lisa said.

"Awful is right! We had a hell of a time putting the security lid on what happened. We know what Ardstein would do if they heard about it. They'd want Formula X-14 in the worst way. They'd have the biggest perfume in America!"

"And will you give it to them?"

"That's just the issue. If we ever release the stuff, just think of the result. There'll be havoc everywhere it goes. Women will be attacked on the street. Men will go to prison. Husbands will divorce wives. Crazy as it sounds, Lisa, this little bottle could start a national panic!"

She was staring at the blue liquid, and her breathing was heavy.

"It's amazing," she whispered. "It's simply amazing, Gary. I never dreamt such a thing was possible—"

"Science is wonderful, all right. The only trouble is—how do we control it?"

She picked it up.

"Gary, I'd like to try it."

"*What?* You're off your head!"

"Please! I just *have* to see if it's true."

"Give me that bottle, Lisa." He said it quietly.

"I must!" she said, clutching it to her breast. "I've just got to try it." Her hand fumbled with the cork. Gary reached desperately across the table-top and caught her wrist. They struggled for possession of the bottle, until Lisa triumphantly broke away and ran to the other side of the room.

She shook a few drops into her hand and placed them on the lobes of her pink ears.

"Lisa, don't!" Gary shouted. "You don't know what you're doing!"

He jumped off the sofa and ran to her. As his arm shot out to recapture the bottle, it dropped from her hand and fell to the

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floor. The contents of Formula X-14 spilt out, and the carpet soaked it up greedily.

"You shouldn't have done that!" he panted. "You shouldn't have, Lisa!"

"I'm sorry, Gary—"

"I don't care about the formula!" he said hoarsely. "But *you*. I care about *you*!" He looked at her with gleaming, hungry eyes.

"Gary, no! I'm not that kind of a girl!"

"I can't help myself!" he choked, advancing upon her. "I just can't help it, Lisa!" His fingers tugged at her fur cape, pulling it from her creamy shoulders.

"No, Gary! Stop it!"

He was embracing her, his hands moving madly.

"You shouldn't have done it!" he rasped. "I can't stop myself, Lisa! I can't stop myself—"

"Poor darling," she moaned. "You poor, poor darling . . ."

In the morning, Gary Claypool awoke late. When he saw what time it was, he hurriedly showered and dressed, and left for the office. But before he entered the building, he went into a nearby chemist's.

At the counter, he said, "Give me a bottle of perfume, please. Nothing too expensive."

In the laboratory, he filled an empty, clear-glass bottle with his purchase and placed it in his locker. Then, whistling, he took from his pocket a ball-point pen and an address book bound in Florentine leather.

Carefully, neatly, almost fastidiously, he drew a line through the name "Lisa Monahon." In his office, he picked up the phone and made a date for the evening.

★ ★ ★

WONDER DRUG

Loss of Memory or Forgetfulness, certainly Cured, By a grateful Electuary, peculiarly adapted for that End; it strikes at the Prime Cause of Forgetfulness, makes the Head clear and Easie, corroborates and revives all the noble Faculties of the Soul, such as Thought, Judgment, Reason, and Memory; which last in particular it so strengthens, as to render that Faculty exceeding quick and good, enabling those whose Memory was before almost totally lost, to remember the Minutest Circumstances of their Affairs, &c., to a wonder. Price, 2s. 6d. a Pot.—

Advertisement from The Spectator, 1712

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RED-HOT FAVOURITE

When I marry
I want it to be from choice

BY NICHOLAS DEE

IT was a fatal day for Robert Kellaway, magazine illustrator, confirmed misogynist, and avoider of the female sex when a picture of him appeared in the editorial column of *Herself*.

"All by Herself," the column was called, and the picture of Robert was so very handsome (taken in a lucky moment without his glasses on,) the paragraph about his tumbledown old house and bachelor existence in Dulwich was so very chatty, that within a week he had been visited by half the magazine's subscribers and written to by the other half which, considering that *Herself* had a circulation verging on the million mark, was too much for a man of peaceful and retiring habits. He never wanted to see a pretty face again, or hear a charming voice offering to mend his socks.

Three weeks later he had sold the Dulwich house and was in the bar-parlour of The Goat and Badger in a small village in West Sussex, asking about transport to drag a railway carriage up to the foot of the downs.

"Mr. Cowlard would lend you his tractor, daresay," said the landlord, "or Mr. Beadle have a pair of carthorses."

"Not horses, no," Robert said, shuddering. "I can't stand the sight of the things. My father used to paint them—Sir Edwin Kellaway, you know, R.A.—and the whole of my childhood was spent giving lumps of sugar to horses to make them stand still in the studio. I'll go and see Mr. Cowlard."

Mr. Cowlard was willing to oblige, and in the golden evening, when the shadows of the downs lay over the fields like ice-cream cones, an orange-and-blue tractor chugged up the chalky track dragging a second-hand first-class Pullman coach.

Robert had found a secluded spot for his retirement. The abandoned single-track railway from Linfold to Cowchester ran through the downs in a long cutting leading to a tunnel. He had leased half a mile of cutting, and a hundred yards of tunnel to be

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used as outhouse and spare bedroom. The track had been taken up, so there was no risk of a haphazard express dashing through and spoiling his living-arrangements.

It was snug, sheltered, and remote, and Mr. Cowlard drove off with the remark that he wished he had a tidy little place like that for when the missis got fratchety.

Food was no problem, since Robert always lived on brown ale, borsch, and breakfast cereals—this had been one of the aspects of his life deplored by *Herself*. He ordered a barrel of beer from The Goat and Badger, and brought a gross carton of Oat Crisps with him from London. There was a sugar-beet field below the downs owned by Mr. Cowlard, who was glad to exchange some of his crop in return for stories of the wicked goings-on in the magazine world. He often strolled up of an evening with a beet or two, and stayed to help Robert convert his Pullman into a studio, and drink a peaceful pint over the puzzles on the backs of the Oat Crisp packets. It was an idyllic existence.

Presently Robert remembered that he was nearing the deadline for his next illustration, to accompany a story called *Orchids for Love*. He felt strangely unwilling to get going. Firstly he had lost the story—but that was nothing new. He always lost the story, and editors had been known to do damage to the plots of authors from Shaw to Shakespeare sooner than ask Robert to alter his illustrations. The main reason for his reluctance to start, however, was that his glasses had fallen off in the excitement of the move and been crushed under the wheels of Mr. Cowlard's tractor, which made him view the world in misty, if beautiful, outline. He had sent the fragments in an Oat Crisp packet to Messrs. Chicory and Flax, opticians in Fleet Street, but had not yet heard from them; it was probable that they were finding the task of repair beyond their powers.

The third obstacle was the difficulty of finding a model who wouldn't start trying to mend his socks.

Robert felt his way down into Linfold, peering about short-sightedly. He gazed with interest at a poster of a handsome black cat on a green background and wondered why it should exhort him to *Keep Albert*. Was Albert the cat? Surely everybody couldn't keep Albert? A few hundred yards farther on it struck him that the poster had probably said *Keep Alert*.

"That's a fine thing to ask a man," he thought dejectedly, and turned into The Goat and Badger to order another barrel of Double Ruby.

"Are there any pretty girls in Linfold?" he asked.

The landlord, who had been so helpful over the transport question, misunderstood him and supplied three addresses in

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quick succession before Robert managed to explain his needs. Then Mr. Cheam shook his head.

" Nary a one in the place; bony as young skeletons with all that horse-riding," he said confidentially.

" I can't abide a horsy woman," Robert agreed.

" Dozens of 'em round here. It's a horsy part of the world. Talkin' of which, can I sell you a ticket for the Derby Sweep? "

" It's a waste of money," sighed Robert, pushing over his half-crown. " I never win anything."

" What 'bout them Oat Crisp puzzles you be forever doin'? " called out Mr. Cowlard from farther down the bar. " Wait till 'ee win five thousand from one o' them."

" But talking about women," Mr. Cheam went on thoughtfully, " I've got a collection of wigs upstairs; a theatrical-lady left 'em behind in settlement of her bill. Would they be any use to you, Mr. Kellaway? They say beautiful hair makes all the difference to a pretty face. Put one of them wigs on my Jimmy and he could sit for you as a young lady I daresay."

" That's not a bad idea," Robert agreed. " In fact it's a damn good one."

It was arranged that Jimmy should bring the wigs up that afternoon for a trial sit, and Robert walked back with satisfaction, looking approvingly at the charming wavy village, his eyes misty from myopia and Double Ruby. He read a placard on the smithy relating to the use of garden hoses as *The Use of Career Horses is Strictly Forbidden*, and reflected with vague wonderment on what these animals might be: vicious tuft-hunting beasts, no doubt, who, once getting the bit between their teeth, dashed off in headlong career down the village street—

" Damn," he said, falling over a lump of chalk in the middle of the track. What use could career horses be put to, anyway? Maybe the villagers had laid bets on them until a stern County Council stepped in and said there must be no more of it.

The picture of Jimmy Cheam in a nylon wig, gazing pensively at a bunch of cowslips, was, of course, rather hazy, owing to Robert's lack of glasses.

" Am I really all runny at the edges like that? " said Jimmy. " Coo."

" That's the way I see you," Robert told him severely. " Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." All the same he squinted at the picture doubtfully as he parcelled it up. Larry will just have to make do with it, he said to himself, my glasses should have come by the time the next one's due. Chicory and Flax had sent a postcard regretting their inability to put the splinters together and promising a new pair within six weeks.

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In the meantime he embarked on an even mistier picture of Jimmy in an auburn wig with an alice-band of marguerites.

Painting was proceeding quietly some days later when it was interrupted as by a bombshell. A large man bounced into the Pullman, rotund, beaming, carnation-buttonholed—the great Larry Selvage himself, editor of *Herself*, looking with a sort of incredulity first at the clutter around him, then at the white dust on the toes of his beautiful shoes.

"Dear boy! So this is where you have hidden yourself! Don't you find it a little remote? a little rustic? a little rural? Not that it lacks personality of course—wait, and I'll just call up Hawkins from the Cadillac with his camera—"

"No no," cried Robert in agony. "You made Dulwich uninhabitable for me, leave me in peace here, for heaven's sake. When I marry I want it to be from choice, not because I have given up the unequal struggle."

"Very well, very well—" Larry waved a hand soothingly. "Just as you say, dear lad. What I really came to tell you was how breathtakingly appealing your last illustration was—that melting, misty radiance! Marvellous! From now on, nothing but that technique—and we've put your price up by fifty guineas."

"Oh, how—how nice," said Robert weakly. "We must celebrate this. Would you like a plateful of borsch?"

But Larry, giving the Pullman a dismissing glance, preferred to take his chance at The Goat and Badger.

Mr. Cheam greeted Robert apologetically. "That's a bit of bad luck your horse has been stolen, Mr. Kellaway," he said with sympathy.

"Horse?" Robert was puzzled. "I haven't got a horse."

"Horse you drew in the Derby Sweep," Mr. Cheam reminded him. "You had Dog-rose, the favourite, remember? And I see in the paper she've been took and stolen. Still, maybe they'll find her before the race. Police on the track, it says."

"Oh, too bad," Robert said inattentively. "Still, she wouldn't have won if I drew her. I never win anything."

He was soon to be contradicted. When he had seen off Larry in the Cadillac, amid exhortations to keep on painting in his new style, he returned to the Pullman to find two men staring thoughtfully at his piled-up cartons of Oat Crisps. Their faces were a vague blur to Robert but he could see that they wore bowlers.

"Pretty little spot you've got here, Mr.—"

"Kellaway," Robert said, wishing they'd go.

"Undisturbed, eh? Not many strangers?"

"That is why I came here," Robert said pointedly. "I don't expect to see a stranger from one week's end to the next."

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"Great eater of Oat Crisps, I see," remarked the smaller bowler. "Ever go in for the competitions?"

"From time to time," Robert admitted.

"I thought so! I knew it! And your first name is—?"

"Robert."

"Not Mr. Robert Kellaway?" The little man seemed overwhelmed at his luck. "The very man we've come to find! We have the pleasure of telling you, sir, that you have won a prize in the Oat Crisp contest."

"Five thousand pounds?" asked Robert hopefully.

"No, sir. Better than that—a pure-bred, fully-trained racehorse. We'll bring it up this evening; always better to move a horse after dark, you know, not so unsettling for it."

"But, hey, hold on—" Robert called after their retreating backs, "I don't want a racehorse! I can't stand the blasted things!"

No use; they had gone, and they returned after dusk with a loose box and unloaded a large horse.

"You'll soon get fond of it," they promised, ignoring Robert's protests. "A horse can be a wonderful companion. You'll wonder how you ever did without it." And they departed briskly, even hurriedly, leaving Robert and his new companion face to face. Robert reflected with embarrassment and annoyance that he didn't even know the creature's name.

"Here, you, Galloper," he said crossly, "you'd better sleep in the tunnel, you needn't think I'm going to put you up in my studio." And he shoved back the metal-mesh gates.

He did, however, feel obliged to tie a pink eiderdown round the horse's middle, as the tunnel seemed a cheerless sort of bedroom. Then he wondered if the animal had had any supper. Oat Crisps seemed more suitable to offer than borsch, and the horse evidently thought so too.

"That's enough, that's *enough*, damn it," snapped Robert, as Galloper demolished a week's ration. He went to bed in an indignant frame of mind; it was going to be a fine thing if all his extra money from *Herself* was to be spent on the upkeep of a huge, hungry horse.

Next morning, though, looking at Galloper, who proved to be a handsome glossy brown the colour of a horse-chestnut, he couldn't help being rather taken with his new possession. He felt shy about informing the village that he had suddenly joined the despised ranks of horse-owners and decided that, for the time at least, he would keep Galloper's presence a secret, until he and the horse had had a chance to get used to each other. Galloper would have to go into the tunnel when callers were expected.

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Later in the day, after ordering another gross of Oat Crisps at the village shop—"How you do get through them, Mr. Kellaway," Miss Grooby said—he went into The Goat and Badger to inquire cautiously if there was anybody round about who taught riding.

"Colonel Paragraph," said Mr. Cheam at once. "Bottom of the hill, big white house on the right. Can't do better. Thinking of riding in the Derby, Mr. Kellaway, ha ha?"

Robert went carefully down the hill. He could now find his short-sighted way through the bumps and crevasses of his own track, but this was strange territory. He began to wonder if he could learn to ride without being able to see more than a couple of yards. Presumably, however, the horse could see where it was going.

He was just able to distinguish the big white house, and went across a cobbled yard where a dimly-glimpsed boy in blue jeans was rubbing down a horse.

"Morning!" yelled a voice in his ear. He turned and saw a brown-tweeded red peony with a white frill round it: Colonel Paragraph.

"Morning, sir," said Robert. "I want to learn to ride."

"Couldn't come to a better place," affirmed the Colonel. "Left it rather late, what? Better late than never, though. Soon put you in the way of it. *Phil!*"

"Father?"

"Bring out Daisy and give this young feller an hour's tuition. Same time every morning for three weeks, eh? That suit? Come in after the lesson for a Black Dewdrop and a yarn—always pleased to see a new face."

The boy Phil was friendly and managed to instruct Robert without making him feel too much of a fool; the ride was quite a success. At the end of the hour Phil stabled the horses while Robert went in for his Black Dewdrop, which proved to be a potent mixture of stout and rum.

"M' daughter will be in soon," said the Colonel, but Robert was not at all anxious to meet the Colonel's daughter, and quickly took himself off.

The routine of the lessons remained the same, and at the end of three weeks Robert had acquired a fair knowledge of how to sit a horse, had consumed twenty-one Black Dewdrops, and had still managed to avoid meeting the Colonel's daughter.

One evening he decided that it was time to try out his new skill on Galloper, who was frisky as a foal from a steady diet of Oat Crisps and no exercise. Robert put on his saddle and bridle, carefully following Phil's technique, climbed onto Galloper's

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back from a pile of sleepers, and urged him up the side of the cutting. When they were at the top, and had a clear five miles of downland before them, he gave the horse a tap with a piece of luggage-rack.

The result was electrifying. Galloper did not jerk or bound or gather himself together: he just started. He started into a sort of jet-propelled forward motion that only occasionally brought him in contact with the ground. Bushes, trees, stones, gateposts swung past indistinguishably, and Robert sat tight and prayed. After a bit he began to enjoy it and prayed a little less; this smooth hurtle was pleasingly different from Daisy's bouncing canter. His only worry was, when would it stop?

To his relief after about twenty minutes Galloper began to slow down a little and Robert was able to turn him round and make for home at a more reasonable pace. All the same it had been quite an experience, and he began to acknowledge that there was something to be said for this riding caper; it was certainly a quick way of getting about the country.

"I have a horse," he said next morning to Phil, "that goes a lot faster than this."

"What sort of horse?" Phil's tone was sceptical. Plainly he didn't trust Robert to know a horse from a camel.

"A racehorse," said Robert. "His name's Galloper. Come up to the Pullman and see him," he added hospitably. It occurred to him that he had now painted Mr. Cheam's Jimmy in each of the wigs and it was time he looked out for a new model; this boy appeared to have a harmless sort of muzzy face, what could be seen of it. "Come up this evening."

He tidied Galloper a bit before the professional's visit; polished off stray crumbs of Oat Crisp and gave him a rub with a suède brush. As Galloper blew sociably down his neck he reflected that it would be quite amusing to paint Phil sitting on the horse; make an interesting bit of composition.

Presently Phil appeared on Daisy with a little parcel bearing the blessed label of Chicory and Flax.

"There's two men with a loose box at the bottom of the hill," he said. "Are you getting another horse? Oh, and the postman asked me to give you this." Then he stopped and gazed open-mouthed at Galloper.

"There!" said Robert proudly. "That's a proper racehorse, isn't it?"

"Where did you get her?"

"Won him. Did you say *her*?"

"Well, she's a mare, isn't she? But don't you know what she is? That's Dog-rose, the favourite that was stolen."

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"Oh, nonsense," Robert said. "Absolute bosh. How do you know? Horses are all alike, you can't tell one from another like that. His name is Galloper and he answers to it, don't you, Galloper?"

All the same a nasty chilly doubt began to gnaw at his mind. This boy seemed very sure of his facts—he probably studied form, whatever that meant. Supposing those two men in bowlers had stolen Galloper—Dog-rose—this would be an excellent place to leave him hidden while pursuit died down. And then they would come back—

"Hey," he said to Phil. "Did you say there were two men with a loose box?"

"Yes."

"Little men with bowlers?"

"Yes, they did have bowlers."

Robert became inspired. "Now listen," he said. "They are the miscreants who palmed off this valuable racehorse on me under false pretences. But I have a plan. I can hear them coming up now. You must take Galloper through the tunnel, out the other end—the gate's always left open—and gallop over the downs to the police station at Cowchester. I'll hold these chaps in play till you're well away, and if they turn nasty I can retreat into the tunnel too and shut the gate on them. You can leave Daisy inside. Now scram—race-gangs always carry razors, I believe."

In fact they could hear the van toiling up the track, and Phil vanished into the tunnel-mouth with Galloper and was soon out of earshot.

Robert flung himself down in a careless attitude on the turf, and began studying an Oat Crisp packet. When the little men appeared he greeted them gaily.

"Good evening," he said. "Don't tell me I've won another horse? Or have you called in to see how Galloper's getting on?"

He hadn't had time to undo the sealed parcel containing his glasses, so he could not see their expressions.

"I'm afraid an unfortunate mistake has occurred," said Small Bowler. "We have discovered that the award was wrongly made. The horse should have gone to a Mr. Oswald Kellaway, and we have come to take it back. Naturally, a written apology from Oat Crisps, Limited, will follow in due course."

"My middle name is Oswald," Robert said affably.

"Now, no joking, please, Mr. Kellaway." Small Bowler's tone was curt and cold. "A mistake was made and we have to rectify it. Where is the horse? I don't want any unpleasantness, but it's a valuable piece of property, and it's coming with us."

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" I pawned him," said Robert.

The little man let out a sort of snarl and moved nearer to Robert, who noticed something glinting in his right hand: a piece of horse-equipment, no doubt.

Robert suddenly lost patience. " It's no use your looking for him," he said rashly, " because he's halfway to Cowchester by this time and the police will be looking for *you*, you lousy pair of swindlers."

The object in Small Bowler's hand went off with a loud bang and Robert's parcel shattered into fragments.

" Look here! " he snapped. " Those were my new glasses."

Then wisdom overtook him, and he leapt into the tunnel entrance, slammed the gate, and raced a hundred yards into the gloom. A couple more bangs behind suggested that the vindictive bowlers were still trying to get him, and bullets ricocheted off the mossgrown concavities of the tunnel. Then they evidently gave it up as a bad job, and he heard the van start and drive off.

" They'll try to intercept Galloper on the way to Cowchester," Robert said to himself, " but it's twenty miles by road and they can't go over the top of the down. They'll never catch him."

Highly satisfied with himself, he mounted Daisy and guided her towards the tiny pinprick of light that was the Cowchester entrance. There was no use in going back, because the gate worked on a spring lock and he kept the key in the Pullman; he would have to continue on and round.

Gradually the pinprick became a keyhole, and expanded to a circle, as Daisy crunched along the permanent way. It grew bigger and bigger, and then Robert began to notice with dismay a metal tracery across it—

" Hullo," hailed a cheerful voice. " I hope you've brought a key with you because this gate is locked."

" *What?* "

" I suppose they wanted to stop sheep from getting in," said Phil. " We'll have to sneak back and out your end when we're sure those men have gone."

" We'll have to spend the night in the tunnel," corrected Robert gloomily. " Unless you're any good at smashing a lock with a stone."

Unfortunately they couldn't even get at the lock, which was on the far side of the steel mesh. It was the neatest prison ever devised.

" Mr. Cowlard might let us out. He comes up to see you in the evenings, doesn't he, sometimes? "

" He's in bed with lumbago."

" Oh. Well, I suppose the postman will let us out in the

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morning. It's a pity it's so damp and stony in here. Still, we've got Dog-rose, that's the main thing."

"Why the devil did they leave him with me? Do I look like a sucker?"

"They do call you crazy Mr. Kellaway in the village because you always look so puzzled," said Phil. He chuckled. "I expect that's what gave the men the idea you'd be a safe bet. And it's nice and secluded."

"I'm not puzzled," said Robert angrily. "I'm short-sighted, that's all. And now those spivs have broken my new pair of glasses. It's all very well for you to laugh, you wretched boy—"

"Say that again," interrupted Phil. Robert patiently repeated what he had said.

"Oh—oh well, of course if you're short-sighted that explains a lot. Do you think," said Phil, "it would be sensible to walk back to your end of the tunnel now?"

"Very well." Robert's tone was chilly. He was wondering how he could make conversation to this boy through the long hours of the night. They started plodding back through the dark with their mounts.

"Do you like cricket?" Robert asked laboriously.

"No," said Phil. But luckily it turned out that Phil was an enthusiastic admirer of Gauguin and Matisse; indeed, Robert had to admit that the boy was an intelligent and amusing companion, and the night passed far more quickly than he would have thought possible. They were stiff and chilly, though, by the time Fred the postman appeared and let them out.

"I suppose I'll have to take Galloper to the police," said Robert sadly when they were drinking coffee in the Pullman.

"I expect there's a reward," Phil consoled him. "You can buy another horse."

That evening, after Robert had paid a rather shamefaced visit to the police with Galloper, and had been mercilessly ribbed in The Goat and Badger for receiving stolen property, he went on to inquire if Phil was all right after his night in the tunnel.

To his surprise Colonel Paragraph was very indignant.

"I suppose you realize you ought to marry my daughter, young feller?" he barked.

"Your daughter?" said Robert, utterly at sea. "I've never laid eyes on her. You must be thinking of somebody else."

"Never laid eyes on her, he says? Didn't you spend the whole night with her in the tunnel? You've compromised her, sir, compromised her!"

"Don't talk nonsense, father," said Phil coming in with two Black Dewdrops. "He didn't even know I was female."

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"Wh—what did you say?" stammered Robert hoarsely.

By Derby Day Robert had grown accustomed to his engaged state, and was finding it quite enjoyable. He even felt secure enough to submit to Larry Selvage's paragraph beginning: *Handsome Bob Kellaway has been caught at last.* His third pair of glasses had not arrived, so he had painted two hazy, gauzy portraits of Phil sitting on fat Daisy, wearing Mr. Cheam's wigs. They had discovered a lot more conversational topics. In fact they would just as soon have stayed at home and gone on painting and talking, but Colonel Paragraph insisted that they must go to the Derby, in which the recovered Dog-rose was a hot favourite.

"If he wins," Robert said, "the manufacturers of Oat Crisps are going to pay me £3,000."

"Should be enough to marry on, my boy, what?" said the Colonel. "Here, you can't see a dam' thing, can you? Have my field-glasses for the run in."

Robert looked through the glasses, but the first thing he saw was his fiancée, Miss Philippa Paragraph, looking so ravishingly beautiful and loving that he felt quite faint. Nemesis had caught up with him at last. He lowered the glasses to reduce her to a bearable haze once more, and stood blissfully holding her hand as Dog-rose romped home to a spectacular finish.

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HIGH HORSES

The advantage of living on the ground floor, to a painter of horses working from the life, was still further impressed on me not long after, when in another block of studios I came upon a man on horseback waiting outside a door on the second floor. My astonishment was great as the painter who lived there specialized in little birds. It turned out that this painter had exhibited at the *Salon* a picture of a lark, executed with such an astounding degree of finish that it had brought him many commissions. Among his customers was an Argentine, who asked if he could do a portrait of a horse with the same perfection.

"Why not?" replied the artist.

"And me upon it," the Argentine added, suggesting at the same time an appointment for a sitting in the studio.

"At my place?" cried the artist in dismay. "What are you thinking of? I live on the second floor!"

"Bueno!" said the Argentine. "In our country, horses go upstairs."

AMBROISE VOLLARD, *Recollections of a Picture Dealer*

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A LOOK AT BEDTIME

Oh, bed, oh, bed! delicious bed!
That heaven upon earth to the weary head.

THOMAS HOOD

My bed, the rest of all my cares,
The end of toiling pain,
Which bringest ease and solace sweet,
While darkness doth remain;
My bed, yield to me slumber sweet,
And trifling dreams repel;
Cause carking care from sobbing breast
To part, where it doth dwell.
All mockeries of this wretched world
Put clean from out my mind:
Do these, my bed, and then by thee
Much comfort shall I find.

TIMOTHY KENDALL,
Flowers of Epigrams, 1577

Faster Sleep

A Moscow factory is now producing a machine which is said to be capable of producing sleep electrically . . . A rubber helmet is placed over the patient's head. Sleep is induced by rhythmic impulses of a weak electric current. A glance at meters reveals how fast asleep the patient is.

from The Times, May, 1957

In bed we laugh, in bed we cry;
And born in bed, in bed we die;
The near approach a bed may show
Of human bliss to human woe.

ISAAC DE BENSERADE, *A Son Lit*

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Graham placed at the disposal of his clients his wonder of wonders, the innermost mystery of the Temple of Health. This was his Celestial Bed. The bed was in the centre of a spacious room pervaded always by rich scents and orchestra in an adjoining room. The bed was supported on six massive glass pillars and bedecked with blue satin. The slightest movement of the occupants made it oscillate rhythmically, and there ran through it electrical currents varying in intensity with the movements of the bed . . .

This magnificent apparatus was at the disposal of any lady and gentleman, preferably married.

The price for one night in the bed—presumably with breakfast—was £50. Graham was a shrewd investor and he reaped enormous dividends . . .

This vogue lasted for three most profitable years, at the end of which time Graham returned to his native Edinburgh, there to preach the virtues of the mud bath.

HARVEY GRAHAM,
Surgeons All

Bedded Downe

And to your more bewitching, see, the proud
Plumpe Bed beare up, and swelling like a cloud,
Tempting the two too modest; can
Yee see it brusle like a Swan,
And you be cold
To meet it, when it woo's and seemes to fold
The Armes to hugge it? throw, throw
Your selves into the mighty overflow
Of that white Pride, and Drowne
The night, with you, in floods of Downe.

ROBERT HERRICK,
Hesperides

Noli Me Tangerine

A great aunt of ours once told us, very firmly, that she never went to bed without first rolling an orange under it, straight through to the other side.

That way, she could be sure that there was no one hiding underneath, or at least no one who liked oranges.

from Woman

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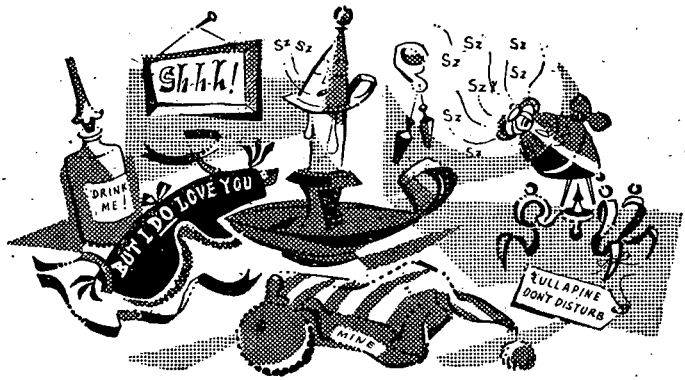
Take a Letter to My Love

First, there were ways to relax before going to bed: vibrating machines that shake the muscles loose, a tranquillising bath essence, a French-style tisane or herbal nightcap. Then there were means to make the bedroom a peaceful place—translucent, plastic window-blinds, filters that keep out sound but let in air, ear plugs and light-excluding masks to bind across the eyes. One of them, in black satin, was inscribed in white letters with the words, " But I do love you." There was also the " Lullapine " an electrical appliance about the size of a vapourizer. Its droning noise gradually lulls and drowses the tense sleeper, said the brochure . . .



Next, we came to his main stock-in-trade; mattresses and beds; any number and any variety of them. There was the tired business man's bed. " It includes a courteous secretary," said the placard . . . There was the lion-and-lamb model, with a mattress that will keep a featherweight wife and a heavyweight husband in perfect equipoise.

CHRISTOPHER SERPELL,
in The Listener

Novel Sideline

To prevent bedtime from becoming monotonous, my husband gets into bed at the right side on Mondays and Tuesdays, the left side Wednesdays and Thursdays, and climbs over the foot-board on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Letter in Reveille

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CLOAK OF DARKNESS

Under the stars, a grass-grown path to lead him once more to Lucrezia

BY ISAK DINESEN

WHEN the great old master, the sculptor Leonidas Allori, whom they called the Lion of the Mountains, was arrested for rebellion and high treason and condemned to death, his pupils wept and stormed. For to them he had been spiritual father, archangel, and immortal. They assembled in Pierino's hostelry outside the town, in a studio or in an attic, where they could sob, two or three in each other's arms, or—like a big tree in a gale with its bare branches reaching upwards—crowded in a cluster could shake ten pairs of clenched fists to the sky, in a cry for rescue of the beloved, and for revenge on tyranny.

Only one out of all of them in those days continued to live as if he had neither heard nor understood the terrible news. And that one was the disciple whom the master had loved above all others, whom he had called son, as the young man had called him father, and to whom he had meant to hand over his art, his inspiration, and his fame, like a torch to raise and carry onward. Angelo Santasilia's schoolfellows took his silence, the strange ethereality in all his movements, and the far-away look in his eyes, to be the expression of infinite sorrow; they respected his pain and left him alone.

But the real reason for Angelo's absence of mind was that his heart was filled with passion for the master's young wife, Lucrezia. The love and understanding between her and him at this time had gone so far that she had promised him her total surrender.

In vindication of the faithless wife it must at this point be pleaded that for a long time, and in deep agitation and alarm, she had resisted the divine and merciless power that held her in its hands. With the most sacred names she had sealed—and had made her lover seal—an oath: that never again should word or glance at which the master himself could not have rejoiced pass between the two. As she felt that neither of them could keep the oath, she entreated Angelo to go to Paris to study under the

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great artist Foyatier. Everything was prepared for his journey. It was only when she realized that this resolve could not be carried out either that she gave herself up to her destiny.

The faithless disciple, too, might have pleaded extenuating circumstances, even if these might not have been accepted by every judge or juryman.

Angelo in his young life had had many love affairs, and in every single case had surrendered himself utterly to his passion, but none of these adventures had ever for any length of time left a deep impression on his being. It was inevitable that, some day, one of them must become the most important of all. And it was reasonable, it was perhaps inevitable, that the chosen mistress should be the wife of his teacher.

He had loved no human being as he had loved Leonidas Allori, no other human being had he at any time wholeheartedly admired. He felt that he had been created by the hands of his master, as Adam by the hands of the Lord; and from these same hands he was to accept his mate.

The Duke of Alba, in Spain, who was a handsome and brilliant man, married a plain and simple-minded lady of the Court and remained faithful to her, and when his friends, amazed at the fact, jestingly questioned him upon it, he answered them that the Duchess of Alba must needs, in her own right, and irrespective of personal qualities, be the most desirable woman in the world. So it was with the disloyal pupil. Once his strong amorous urge was joined with that great art that to him was the highest ideal of all —and was, moreover, coupled with a deep personal devotion— a fire was kindled, which later on he himself could not restrict.

Neither was Leonidas himself without blame in regard to the two young people. Day by day, in conversations with his favourite pupil, he had dwelt on Lucrezia's beauty. While making the young woman pose for his lovely and immortal *Psyche with the Lamp*, he called upon Angelo to try, at his side in the studio, his hand at the same task, and did indeed interrupt his own work in order to point out the beauties in the living, breathing, and blushing body before them, enraptured and inspired as in front of a classic work of art.

Of this strange understanding between the old and the young artist neither of them was really conscious, and if a third person had spoken to them of it, they would have rebuffed him with indifference, perhaps with impatience. The one who suspected it was the woman, Lucrezia. And through it she suspected, with a kind of giddiness, the hardness and coldness that may be found in the hearts of men and artists, even towards the ones whom those hearts embrace with deepest tenderness. Her own heart

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lamented, in complete loneliness, as a lamb laments when led by its shepherd to the shambles.

As now, through various unusual occurrences in his daily life, Leonidas realized that he was being watched and followed, and from this fact concluded that he was in great danger, he became so deeply obsessed by the idea of his own death, and of the approaching end to his artistic career and to his vigorous life, that his whole being centred upon it. He spoke no word of his danger to the people round him, because these people, in the course of a few weeks, to him had become infinitely distant and thus, in accordance with the law of perspective, infinitely small. He might have wished to complete the work on which he was engaged, but soon this work too to him seemed an unreasonable and inconvenient distraction from the matter that really engrossed him.

For the whole of this time he was almost mute, and to his pupils had all the appearance of a man who has covered his head with his mantle. From this muteness they expected a new masterpiece and expression of his genius, and none of them guessed that that for which he was preparing himself was annihilation. Towards the end, in the last days before his arrest, he stepped out of his isolation, unwontedly gentle and considerate to all those around him.

He also sent Lucrezia away to the house of a friend, the owner of a vineyard, in the mountains a few miles from town. When, in order to give a reason for this arrangement—for he did not wish her to have any suspicion of the actual position—he explained to her that she looked pale and feverish, he himself believed that he was using a casual pretence to persuade her to leave him, and he smiled at the deep concern with which she received his command.

She at once sent word to Angelo and told him of her husband's decision. The lovers, who in anguish had been seeking an opportunity to meet and fulfil their love, looked one another in the eyes in triumphant certainty that now, and from now on, all powers of life were uniting to serve them, and that their passion was the lodestone which, according to its will, attracted and ranged everything around them. Lucrezia before now had visited the farm, and she instructed Angelo how, by a certain path in the mountains, he could approach the house unseen, and come to her window.

The window faced west, the moon would be in its first quarter, she would be able to discern the figure of her lover between the vines. When he picked up a pebble from the ground and threw it against the window pane, she would open the window. It was raised a little above the ground, but not too high for a strong

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and lithe young man, with a hand from a person within, to swing himself up on to the sill.

As, in the course of their deliberation, they came to this moment, the voices of both faltered. To regain his equilibrium Angelo told her that for the nocturnal journey he had bought himself a large and fine cloak of violet goat's wool with brown embroideries, which a friend from the country, who was hard up for the moment, had offered to him.

All this they discussed in Lucrezia's room next to the studio where the master was working, and with the door to it open. The meeting, they decided, was to take place not on the first, but on the second Saturday evening.

They parted, and just as, all through the following week, the thought of death and eternity accompanied the master, the thought of Lucrezia's body against his own accompanied the young disciple. This thought, without having at any time really left him, constantly seemed to return to him anew like the remembrance of a surprising, joyful message—*Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night . . . Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.*

On Sunday morning Allori was arrested and taken to prison. In the course of the week several interrogations followed, and possibly the old patriot might have justified himself in some of the accusations brought against him. But in the first place, the government was resolved this time to make an end of such a dangerous enemy, and in the second place, the accused himself was resolved not to upset, by any ups and downs, the sublime balance of mind he had attained.

There was from the very beginning no real doubt as to the outcome of the case. Judgment was passed, and orders were given that next Sunday morning that most famous son of the people should be stood up against the prison wall, to fall against the cobbles with six bullets in his breast.

In the last days that were granted to him Leonidas requested that he might receive some of his pupils in his cell, and his request was granted. He first asked for Angelo, but Angelo was not to be found in town. A number of the conversations, which the master in the prison had with the young men, were written down by them, and in later years taken out again to fill their souls with delight and an indescribable sense of loss. Towards the end of the week the old artist asked to be paroled for twelve hours in order to go to the place where his wife was staying, and to take leave of her.

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His plea was refused. But such great strength had this man still in him, and with such an aura of radiance did his fame and his integrity of heart surround his person, that his words could not die quickly in the ears of those to whom they were addressed. The last request of the condemned man was brought up again and weighed by his judges, even after he himself had given up hope and had almost forgotten it.

It so happened that the topic was raised in a house where Cardinal Salviati was present.

" No doubt," said His Eminence, " clemency here might set a dangerous precedent. But the country—and the Royal House itself which possesses some of his works—is in debt to Allori. I have the happiness to own his *Centaur*, and if at times I find myself in low spirits it will, snorting and pawing the earth, call me back to a more dignified state of mind. This man has often by his art restored men's faith in themselves—maybe men should now have faith in him."

He thought the matter over and continued, " It is said that the master—do they not call him the Lion of the Mountains?—is deeply loved by his pupils. We might find out if he has really been able to awaken a devotion which will defy death—who among us does not wish to arouse such? We might, in his case, make use of the old rule which will allow a prisoner—even a prisoner condemned to death—to leave his prison for a specified period, on the condition that he produces a hostage to die in his stead, if he himself does not return in time.

" Allori," said the Cardinal, " last summer did me the honour of executing the reliefs on my villa at Ascoli. He had with him there his beautiful young wife, who as far as I remember was named Lucrezia, and a very handsome young disciple, Angelo by name, whom he called his son, just as the young man called him father. We might let Leonidas know that he can obtain his freedom for a period of twelve hours, during which, as he wishes, he can take leave of his wife. But the condition will be that this young Angelo shall enter the prison cell as he himself leaves it, and that it will be made clear to both the old and the young artist that at the expiration of the twelve hours at all events an execution will be carried out in the prison yard."

A feeling that in the circumstances it would be correct to decide on something unconventional made the powerful gentlemen with whom the matter rested accept the Cardinal's suggestion. The condemned man was informed that his request had been granted, and on what conditions. Once more Leonidas sent word to Angelo.

The young artist was not in his room when his schoolfellows

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came to bring him the message and to fetch him to the prison. Even though he had not paid any attention to the sorrow of his friends, it had nevertheless upset and distressed him, since at this moment he himself conceived the universe as perfect in beauty and harmony, and life in itself as boundless grace. He had kept apart from his fellows in a sort of antagonism, just as in respect and commiseration they had kept apart from him, and he had finally walked out of an atmosphere which, without himself realizing it—for he would never occupy himself much with his own feelings or moods—still gave him offence, as if it had contained a mockery against the gods.

He had travelled afoot the long way to the Duke of Miranda's villa to see a recently unearthed Greek statue of the god Dionysus in its garden. Still without really knowing it, he had wished and resolved to have a powerful work of art confirm his conviction of the divinity of the world.

His friends thus had to wait for him a long time in a small room high above the narrow street. In the end they foresaw the possibility that he would never return, and that one of them would have to offer himself in his stead, and upon this fell into a heated rivalry. When the chosen one finally entered, they pounced on him from all sides and informed him of the sad honour that awaited him.

So little had the master's favourite understood the nature and extent of the misfortune that had befallen himself and all of them that the messengers had to repeat their tidings to him. When at last he comprehended, he stood petrified for a while, in the deepest grief. In the manner of a sleep-walker he inquired about the sentence and the execution, and his comrades, with tears in their eyes, gave him their answers. But when they came to the offer made to Leonidas, and the prisoner's request for Angelo, light returned to the young man's eyes and colour to his cheeks. He asked his friends, indignantly, why they had not informed him at once; then without words he tore himself from their grasp to hasten to the prison.

But on the doorstep he stopped, seized by the solemnity of the moment. He had walked a long way and had slept on the grass, his clothes were covered with dust, and he had torn a rent in one sleeve. He did not wish to appear before his master like this, today. He lifted his big new cloak from the hook on which it hung, and put it on.

The warders in the prison knew in advance of his coming. He had to prove his identity before an officer in a dirty orderly room, and was led away by this gentleman and two warders to the

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condemned man's cell, and let in. He threw himself into his master's arms.

Leonidas Allori calmed him. To make the young man forget the present, he turned the conversation round to the stellar heavens, of which he had often talked with his son, and in the knowledge of which he had instructed him. Soon his great gaze and deep, clear voice lifted his pupil up there with him, as if the two of them, hand in hand, had slipped back many years, and were now speaking together all by themselves in a lofty, carefree world. Only when the teacher had seen the tears dry on the pale young face before him did he return to the earth, and he asked his pupil if he was indeed prepared to spend, in his place, the night in the prison.

Angelo replied that he knew he was.

" I thank you, my son," said Leonidas, " for giving me twelve hours which will be of boundless importance to me.

" Ay, I believe in the immortality of the soul," he continued, " and perhaps the eternal life of the spirit is the one true reality. I do not know yet, but I shall know tomorrow. But this physical world around us, these four elements—earth, water, air, and fire—are these not realities as well? And is not also my own body—my marrow-filled bones, my flowing, never-pausing blood, and my five glorious senses—divinely true? Others think that I am old. But I am a peasant and of peasant stock, and our soil to us has been a stern, bountiful nurse. My muscles and sinews are but firmer and harder than when I was a youth, my hair is as luxurious as it was then, my sight is not in the least impaired, I perceive sounds, scents, the taste of wine and bread, and the contact with things around me more richly and more delicately than before.

" All these faculties I shall now leave here behind me for, as my spirit goes forth on new paths, the earth—my own well-loved Campania—will take my honest body in her honest arms and will make it one with herself. But I wish to meet nature face to face once more, and to hand it over to her in full consciousness, as in a gentle and solemn conversation between friends. Tomorrow I shall look to the future, I shall collect myself and prepare myself for the unknown.

" But tonight I shall go out, free in a free world, among things familiar to me. I shall observe the rich play of light of the sunset, and after that the moon's divine clarity and the ancient constellations of the stars round her. I shall hear the song of running water and taste its freshness, breathe the sweetness and bitterness of trees and grass in the darkness, and feel the soil and the stones under the soles of my feet. What a night awaits me! All gifts

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given to me I shall gather together into my embrace, to give them back again in profound understanding, and with thanks."

"Father," said Angelo, "the earth, the water, the air, and the fire must needs love you, the one in whom none of their gifts has been wasted."

"I believe that myself, my son," said Leonidas. "Always, from the time when I was a child in my home in the country, have I believed that God loved me.

"I cannot explain to you—for the time is now but short—how, or by what path, I have come to understand in full God's infinite faithfulness towards me. Or how I have come to realize the fact that faithfulness is the supreme divine factor by which the universe is governed. I know that in my heart I have always been faithful to this earth and to this life, I have pleaded for liberty tonight in order to speak to them before I part from them, and to let them know that I do not unfaithfully leave them, but that our parting itself is a pact.

"Then tomorrow I shall be able to fulfil my pact with great Death and with things to come."

He spoke slowly, and now stopped, and smiled. "Forgive me for talking so much," he said. "For a week I have not talked to a person whom I loved."

But when he spoke again his voice and mien were deeply serious.

"And you, my son," he said, "you, whom I thank for your faithfulness throughout our long happy years—and tonight. Be you also always faithful to me. I have thought of you in these days, between these walls. I have fervently wished to see you once again, not for my own sake, but in order to tell you something. Yes, I had much to say to you, but I must be brief. Only this, then, I enjoin and implore you: keep always in your heart the divine law of proportion, the golden section."

"Gladly, gladly do I remain here tonight," said Angelo. "But even more gladly would I tonight go with you, just as on many nights, we have wandered together."

Leonidas smiled again. "My road tonight," he said, "under the stars, by the grass-grown, dewy mountain paths, takes me to one thing, and to one alone. I shall be, for one last night with my wife, with Lucrezia. I tell you, Angelo, that in order that man—His chief work, into whose nostrils He had breathed the breath of life—might embrace and become one with the earth, the sea, the air, and the fire, God gave him woman. In Lucrezia's arms I shall be sealing, in the night of leave-taking, my pact with all these."

He was silent for a few moments, and motionless.

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" Lucrezia," he then said, " tonight is a few miles from here, in the care of good friends. I have, through them, made sure that she has learnt nothing of my imprisonment or my sentence. I do not wish to expose my friends to danger, and they shall not know, tonight, that I come to their house. Neither do I wish to come to her as a man condemned to death, with the breath of the grave on me, but our meeting shall be like our first night together, and its secrecy to her shall mean a young man's fancy and a young lover's folly."

" What day is it today? " Angelo suddenly asked.

" What day? " Leonidas repeated. " Do you ask that of me—me who have been living in eternity, not in time? To me this day is called: the Last Day. But stay, let me think. Why, my child, to you, and to the people around you, today is named Saturday. Tomorrow is Sunday.

" I know the road well," he said a short while later, thoughtfully, as if he were already on his journey. " By a mountain path I approach her window from behind the farm. I shall pick up a pebble and throw it against the window pane. Then she will awake and wonder, she will go to her window, discern me among the vines, and open it."

His mighty chest moved as he drew his breath.

" Oh, my child and my friend," he exclaimed, " you know this woman's beauty. You have dwelt in our house and have eaten at our table; you know, too, the gentleness and gaiety of her mind, its childlike tranquillity, and its inconceivable innocence. But what you do not know, what nobody knows in the whole world but I, is the infinite capacity of her body and soul for surrender. How that snow can burn, Angelo!

" Pygmalion too was a sculptor, and one single time he made the marble come to life under his hands—the memory of that moment will have echoed through his life. But I, I have experienced this miracle time and time again, and before it became memory it was renewed. I have toyed with the idea that the sun —which gives colour and life to everything on earth—when it sinks below the horizon, pours into her body its whole being and power. Nay, this you cannot possibly understand. But she has been to me all the glorious works of art of the world, all of them in one single woman's body. Within her embrace at night my strength to create in the day-time was restored. As I speak to you of her, my blood lifts like a wave—*Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night . . . This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes . . . I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof.*"

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He closed his eyes. "When I come back here tomorrow," he said, "I shall come with my eyes closed. They will lead me in here from the gate, and later, at the wall, they will bind a cloth before my eyes. I shall have no need of these eyes of mine. And it shall not be the black stones, nor the gun barrels, that I shall leave behind in these my dear, clear eyes when I quit them."

Again he was silent for a while, then said in a soft voice, "At times, this week, I have not been able to recall the line of her jaw from ear to chin. At daybreak tomorrow morning I shall look upon it, so that I shall never again forget it."

When again he opened his eyes, his radiant gaze met the gaze of the young man. He looked at him awhile, and stroked his cheek lightly, with gentle indulgence, as if he had been a child.

"Do not look at me in such pain and dread," he said, "and do not pity me, I do not deserve that of you. Nor—you will know it—am I to be pitied tonight. My son, I was wrong: tomorrow, as I come back, I shall open my eyes once more in order to see your face, which has been so dear to me. Let me see it happy and at peace, as when we were working together."

The prison warder, who had given master and pupil time to talk together and to come to their decision, and who had been waiting outside the door, now turned the heavy key in the lock and came in. He informed the prisoners that the clock in the prison tower showed a quarter to six, within a quarter of an hour one of the two must leave the building.

Allori answered that he was ready, but he hesitated a moment.

"They arrested me," he said to Angelo, "in my studio and in my working-smock. But the air may grow colder as I get into the mountains. Will you lend me your cloak?"

Angelo removed the violet cloak from his shoulders and handed it to his teacher. As he fumbled at his throat with the hook, with which he was unfamiliar, the master took the young hand that helped him, and held it.

"How grand you are, Angelo," he said. "This cloak of yours is new and costly. In my native parish a bridegroom wears a cloak like this on his wedding day.

"Do you remember," he added, as he stood ready to go in the cloak, "one night, when together we lost our way in the mountains? Suddenly you collapsed, exhausted and cold as ice, and whispered that it was impossible for you to go any farther. I took off my cloak then—just as you did now—and wrapped it around us both. We lay the whole night together in each other's arms, and in my cloak you fell asleep almost immediately, like a child. You are to sleep tonight too!"

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Angelo collected his thoughts, and remembered the night of which the master was speaking. Leonidas had always been a far more experienced mountaineer than he himself, just as Leonidas's strength had always exceeded his own. He recalled the warmth of that big body, like that of a huge friendly animal in the dark, against his own numb limbs. It had seemed as if, in the course of the night, the two in the cloak had come to have but one blood circulation. He remembered, further, that as he woke up the sun had risen, and all mountain slopes had become luminous in its rays. He had sat up, then, and had cried out, "Father, this night you have saved my life."

From his breast came a groan, wordless.

"We will not take leave tonight," said Leonidas, "but tomorrow morning I shall kiss you."

The gaoler opened the door and held it open, while the towering, straight figure stepped over the threshold. Then the door was once more shut, the key once more turned in the lock, and Angelo was alone.

Within the first second he felt the fact that the door was locked and that nobody could come in to him, as an incomparable favour. But immediately after, he fell to the floor, like a man struck by and crushed beneath a falling rock. He remained lying thus for a long time and hoped that now death would come.

But death did not come, and he slowly rose to his knees, conscious, at the same time, that he was unworthy of the posture. For the angels in heaven kneel, he had sculpted them so, but he himself was doomed and damned for ever.

In his ears echoed the voice of the master. And before his eyes stood the figure of the master, illuminated by the radiance of a higher world, of art's infinite universe. From this world of light, which his father had once opened to him, he was now cast down into darkness. After the one whom he had betrayed had gone from him, he was completely alone. He dared not think of the stellar heavens, nor of the earth, nor of the sea, nor of the rivers, nor of the marble statues that he had loved.

If at this moment Leonidas Allori himself had wanted to save him, it would not have been possible to him. For to be unfaithful is to be annihilated.

The word unfaithful was now flung on him from all angles, like a shower of flints on the man who is being stoned, and he met it on his knees, with hanging arms, like a man stoned. But when at last the shower slackened, and after a silence the words, "the golden section," rose and echoed, subdued and significant, he raised his hands and pressed them against his ears.

And unfaithful, he thought after a time, for the sake of a

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woman. What is a woman? She does not exist until we create her, and she has no life except through us. She is nothing but body, but she is not body even, if we do not look at her. She claims to be brought to life, and requires our soul as a mirror, in which she can see that she is beautiful. Men must burn, tremble, and perish, in order that she may know that she exists and is beautiful.

When we weep, she weeps too, but with happiness—for now she has proof that she is beautiful. Our anguish must be kept alive every hour, or she is no longer alive.

All my creative power, his thoughts went on, if things had gone as she wished, would have been used up in the task of creating her, and of keeping her alive. Never, never again should I have produced a great work of art.

And when I grieved over my misfortune, she would not understand, but would declare, "Why, but you have *me*!" While with him, I was a great artist!

Yet he was not really thinking of Lucrezia, for to him there was in the world no other human being than the father whom he had betrayed. In this same way, for Adam, in the hour of the Fall, the hour when he was banished from Paradise, the woman who had tempted him and brought about his downfall would have had no real existence; the matter rested between God and himself.

Did I ever believe, Angelo thought after a while, did I ever believe that I was, or that I might become, a great artist, a creator of glorious statues? I am no artist, and I shall never create such a statue. For I know that my eyes are gone—I am blind!

After a further lapse of time his thoughts slowly turned away from eternity, and back to the present.

The master, he thought, would walk up the path and stop near the house, among the vines. He would pick up a pebble from the ground and throw it against the window pane, and then she would open the window.

She would call to the man in the violet cloak, as she was wont to do at their meetings, "Angelo!" And the great master, the unfailing friend, the immortal man sentenced to death, would understand that his disciple had betrayed him.

During the previous day and night Angelo had walked far and slept but little, and the whole of the last day he had not eaten. He now felt that he was tired unto death. His master's command, "You are to sleep tonight," came back to him, the last of all sounds in the night and the cell. Leonidas's commands, when he had obeyed them, had always led him right. He rose to his feet and fumbled his way to the pallet where his master had lain.

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He fell asleep almost immediately. But as he slept, he dreamt.

He saw once more, and more clearly than before, the big figure in the cloak walk up the mountain path, stop and bend down for the pebble and throw it against the pane. But in the dream he followed him farther and saw the woman in the man's arms—Lucrezia! And he awoke.

He sat up on the bed.

Nothing sublime or sacred was any longer to be found in the world, but the deadly pain of physical jealousy stopped his breath and ran through him like a fire. Gone was the disciple's reverence for his master, the great artist; in the darkness the son ground his teeth at his father. The past had vanished, there was no future to come, all the young man's thoughts ran to one single point—the embrace there, a few miles away.

He returned to a sort of consciousness, and resolved not to fall asleep again.

But he did fall asleep again, and dreamt the same, but now more vividly, and with a multitude of details which he himself disowned, which his imagination could only have engendered when in his sleep he no longer had control of it.

In his next dream the master exulted over him. He repeated what he had said during the conversation in the cell. See, his body was a young man's; his perception of sounds, scents, and the things around him was richer and more delicate than before. He towered, naked, as powerful as his own Hercules, magnificent in strength and equipoise—*man* himself, as God created him, at the never-to-be-repeated, solemn and glorious acme of his creative power.

When after his dream he was once more wide awake, a cold sweat broke out over his limbs. Nay, he was not Ham, or worse than Ham, and it was not to be cried out over him, "*Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be!*" But it *was* cried out over him, and there was no escape from it. When he had forced all things around him to silence, he cried it out himself.

From the pallet he noticed some glowing embers on the fireplace; he now got up, set his naked foot upon them and kept it there. But the embers were almost dead, and went out under his foot.

In the next dream he himself, silent and lurking, followed the wanderer on the mountain path and through the window.

He had his knife in his hand, he leapt forward and plunged it first in the man's heart, then in hers, as they lay clasped in one another's arms.

But the sight of their blood, mingled, soaking into the sheet, like a red-hot iron burnt out his eyes. Half awake, once more sitting

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up, he thought, But I do not need to use the knife. I can strangle them with my hands.

Thus passed the night.

When the turnkey of the prison awakened him, it was light.

"So you can sleep?" said the turnkey. "So you really trust the old fox? If you ask me, I should say he has played you a fine trick. The clock shows a quarter to six. When it strikes, the warden and the colonel will come in, and take whichever bird they find in the cage. The priest is coming later. But your old lion is never coming. Honestly—would you or I come, if we were in his shoes?"

When Angelo succeeded in understanding the words of the turnkey, his heart filled with indescribable joy. Why, this was indeed like the night they had spoken of, the night in the mountains, at the moment when the sun rose. There was nothing more to fear. God had granted him this way out: death. This happy, easy way out: death.

Vaguely, through his aching head one thought ran, And it is for him that I die. But the thought sank away again, for he was not really thinking of Leonidas Allori, or of any person in the world round him. He felt only one thing: that he himself, within the last moment, had been pardoned. Ay, pardoned beyond all measure and understanding.

He got up, washed his face in a basin of water brought him by his guard, and combed his hair back. He now felt the pain of the burn in his foot and again was filled with gratitude. Now he also remembered the master's words about God's faithfulness.

The turnkey looked at him for a while and said, "I took you for a young man yesterday."

After some time footsteps could be heard up the stone-paved passage, and a faint rattling. Angelo thought, Those are the soldiers with their carbines.

The heavy door swung open, and between two warders, who held his arms, entered Allori. In accordance with his words the evening before, he let himself be led forward with closed eyes by the warders. But he felt or perceived where Angelo was standing in the narrow room, and took a step towards him. He stood silent before him, unhooked his cloak, lifted it from his own shoulders, and laid it around the young man's.

In this movement the two were brought close, body to body, and Angelo said to-himself, Perhaps, after all, he will not open his eyes and look at me. But whenever had Allori not kept a given word? The hand which—as it put the cloak round him—rested against Angelo's neck, forced his head a little forward, the large

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eyelids trembled and lifted, and the master looked into the eyes of the disciple. But the disciple could never afterwards remember or recall the look. A moment later he felt Allori's lips on his cheek.

"Well, now!" cried the turnkey who had awakened Angelo, with surprise in his voice. "Welcome back!

"We were not expecting you, now you must take pot luck! And you," he added, turning to Angelo, "you can go your way, farewell to you!—there are still a few minutes to six o'clock, my lords are not coming till after it has struck. The priest is coming later. Things are done with precision here. And fair—as you know—is fair."

★ ★ ★

WHAT'S WHAT?

To which the only reply is, what indeed? However, there are many questions with less enigmatical answers, and here are some of them.
If your brain is working at high wattage, what's to stop you sailing through to our total score of 10?
If not, turn to page 101

1. *Up to what amount are pennies legal tender?*
2. *Whose official residence is* 11, *Downing Street?*
3. *How many feet has a lobster?*
4. *Who said, "Every man over* 40 *is a scoundrel?"*
5. *"I have just received a blushing crow." Of what is this an example?*
6. *Shakespeare was responsible for one line in each of the following verses. Who wrote the others?*
   a. *O Mistress mine, where are you roaming,*
      Roamin' in the gloamin'
   b. *You shall yourself read in the bitter letter*
      Anything you can do I can do better
   c. *. . . Daffodils,*
      That come before the swallow dares, and take
      A highly geological home-made cake
7. *What connection have taxis with a Birmingham architect and an Irish saint?*
8. *Can a man marry his widow's sister?*

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A SEAL THAT COULDN'T SWIM

BY ALEXIS LADAS

IT is disproportionately distressing to me to hear people confusing ordinary seals with sea lions. Sea lions balance things and blow horns at circuses. They are slapstick clowns. Seals are sad-eyed creatures full of pathos and sentimentality. Clowns they may be, but their humour is often mixed with tears. They don't grin like sea lions; they smile, and that rarely. Mostly they look helpless and forlorn. At least that is how Panayoti looked most of the time.

Devotion and a passionate need to be loved seemed to be the mainsprings of his character, but perhaps that was because he had lost his mother when he was still very young and I had saved him from a dreadful death at the hands of the fishermen who had found him in a cave. I say " him," although I never found out what his sex really was, probably because when I first saw him he looked and acted like a frightened little boy who is trying his best to be brave.

In those days I was abysmally ignorant about seals. I had no idea what I was letting myself in for when I ordered that the creature be brought aboard my raiding schooner. The last thing that crossed my mind when I determined to adopt Panayoti was that I would pass the closing phases of the war in the Aegean playing nursemaid to an inexperienced seal and have to face something approaching mutiny among my crew. All I knew was that it was intolerable to watch a helpless little creature left to

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die of thirst under a pile of stones in a sun-baked courtyard. My blood boiled at the thought that six brawny fishermen were too superstitious to dare to kill the little animal outright, but had to immure it collectively so that the bad luck would be spread among them. Greek fishermen are poorer and more omen-ridden than most seafaring people, so it is not surprising that they both hate and fear seals.

The Mediterranean seal—Monachus Albiventer, the white-bellied monk, the solitary one—is a clever animal. Long ago he discovered that it is much easier for him to gather the fish that are caught in nets than to go chasing after free ones. Monachus is neither very considerate nor very finicky, and he has extremely sharp teeth. When he gets into a net and starts feeding, he doesn't trouble to disentangle the fish. He simply swallows them, together with large pieces of the net itself. Often the net is ruined beyond repair, and nets are a fisherman's livelihood. They are also expensive. Thus in a Greek fishing village the cry "seal" is a cry of despair.

The superstitious dread in which the creatures are held is just as real as the hate, although it is more complicated to explain and more difficult to understand. Twice in his life, the porter at my grandmother's house in Athens, who had once been a schooner captain, had put back into harbour at great expense because when he set out a seal had crossed his bow. The loss of his ship in a collision, he was unshakably convinced, was due to his having ignored a third such warning.

It was from him that I first heard the old, old story of the Gorgon, that monstrous mermaid who frequents the blue Aegean Sea. She rises out of the water and stops the ship with her hand. She looks into the eyes of the captain and asks him whether Alexander the Great is alive. If he says, "Yes. He is alive and reigning," she lets the ship go on its way. If he has not heard of the legend and says, "No," then he and his ship are dragged down to the depths.

The legend is that Alexander acquired a tiny phial of water from the spring of immortality. His sister found it in a cupboard and drank it out of curiosity. When Alexander was on his deathbed, he called for the water and was told that his sister had drunk it. With his dying breath he cursed her. In desperation she tried to kill herself by jumping off a cliff into the sea. Since she had drunk the water, it did no good, and she has lived ever since with her intolerable guilt. From time to time she rises to the surface, hoping to find some seaman who will tell her that Alexander did not die.

How it happens that a seal is identified with a mermaid, the

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mermaid with a snake-haired monster of antiquity, and that monster with the great Alexander's sister, I don't know. I don't suppose anybody knows just how beliefs are changed and moulded and transferred.

But to the old schooner captain there was no incongruity in believing simultaneously that the little round head which showed for a moment among the waves was both an animal of no great strength and a female demon who could root his ship to the spot. And he was no exception among Greek seamen. But I myself did not learn all these things until later, and as far as seals went I lived in a fool's paradise.

First of all, I was under the illusion that they knew how to swim and that they lived on fish. It never occurred to me that these things did not come naturally. All I had wanted to do was to rescue Panayoti, provide him with a good meal of fish, and then give him his freedom. I was quickly disabused.

From the very first moment everything went wrong. To begin with, I antagonized the whole village by curtly ordering the fishermen to deliver the seal to me. They may have been too frightened to kill the seal outright, but they were damned if a young whippersnapper of a reserve lieutenant was going to boss them around, even if he did control the hungry island's supply of food and had enough fire power at his command to blast the village to hell. What is more, my own crew was not at all enthusiastic.

Since I could not very well open hostilities with my countrymen over a seal, I found myself in the position of having to swallow my anger and negotiate. The villagers for their part did not wish to press matters too far. After a decent interval the fishermen offered to sell me the seal. I paid for him with food which they would have received anyway, together with some discarded clothing, and everybody's pride was saved. Panayoti was brought aboard, looking filthy and miserable after his ordeal.

Then and there I found out that I had made a second and more serious mistake. Panayoti refused to have anything to do with the fish which I bought for his dinner.

Every time I offered him one, he would turn his head away and start crying. The noise he made was heartbreaking—something between the wail of a baby and the bleat of a lamb. I tried

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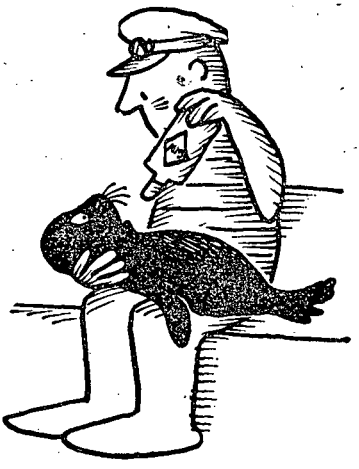
everything. I rubbed his nose with the fish, but he only cried louder. I pushed the fish into his mouth. He spat it out. Thinking that perhaps the fish was too big for him to swallow, I cut it up into small pieces and tried to force them down his throat. He spat them out too. I decided that the only thing to do was to let Panayoti go on his way without a meal, since probably he preferred to catch his own fish.

I dropped Panayoti overboard, expecting to see him streak off. The next thing I knew he was drowning: his head went down and his tail flippers came up out of the water. They beat wildly for a time, then more and more feebly. A stream of bubbles rose from his mouth. There could be no doubt that Panayoti did not know how to swim. I dived overboard and fished him out, which took some doing, since he was very slippery and I didn't know then that the best way to pick up a seal is from under the flippers, the way one picks up a baby. Besides, I was still not at all sure he wouldn't bite.

I needn't have worried. The poor creature was more dead than alive when I got him aboard again. I was afraid he might die and gave him artificial respiration as best I could. After a while he revived and started crying again weakly, moving his head from side to side in the most dejected manner. In a few minutes he seemed completely recovered and went crawling about the deck in that hopelessly inept, broken-boned way seals have out of the water. But at least he was clean now and his fur was fluffing up in the sunshine, turning from black to a soft dove-grey on top and ivory underneath.



By then it had belatedly occurred to me that Panayoti was only a baby. I know it sounds stupid that I had not thought of it earlier, but I had never seen a seal before and I had no basis for comparison. A length of nearly three feet did not seem to me conclusive one way or the other. I began suspecting it when I found out, on trying to feed him more fish, that he had no teeth. So I tried milk. First I gave him some in a saucer, but he only turned away and spilt it with his flippers. Then I made a feeding-bottle out

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of an empty gin bottle with a nipple made from the little finger of a rubber glove which we used for handling the smoke-screen apparatus. It was a complete flop. Panayoti didn't even want to look at it. The mere sight sent him into tantrums. He became hysterical when I tried to force the nipple into his mouth and went dragging himself round and round in circles across the deck screaming his head off.

More in self-defence than from compassion I opened a tin of New Zealand butter, of which we had a lot, and stuffed his mouth full of it. He spat most of it out, but a good deal stuck and for a time he was too busy choking and spitting to make much noise. He was so quiet that I almost forgot about him, and when I looked for him later I discovered to my delight that he was engaged in licking the butter off his nose. I spent the rest of the day carrying the tin of butter around with me and smearing Panayoti's nose every time I passed him.

Since this method could not be used in the darkness and Panayoti was still very hungry, nobody got much sleep that night. The following day I decided that a new system had to be devised. It was, after all, unseemly for a raiding captain to spend his time buttering the nose of a seal, nor could I very well ask any of my sailors to take over the duty. Watching Panayoti crawling over the deck in his endless rounds, it occurred to me that a self-smearing technique could be devised. If a part of the deck were enclosed with cases to limit him in his movements, and pats of butter were scattered at random all over it, he was bound to run into some of them and butter his nose automatically. It worked like a dream.

Then there was an alarm. The lookout reported an unidentified vessel on the horizon. I ordered action stations and the men streamed aft to man the machine guns. Those on the starboard side forgot about the butter in their excitement and ended up in a cursing, tangled heap in the scuppers.

The boatswain, a very irascible man, was among them. When he managed to pick himself up, dripping butter, he scowled at me and delivered himself of a dire prophecy: "It was an evil day when you brought that animal aboard. It will go ill with us, Captain, but with you worst of all. Mark my words," and he stalked off.

By good fortune the ship which had caused all the commotion turned out to be one of ours, and the incident fizzled out. But the obvious drawback of slippery decks gave me a brilliant idea. I drilled a hole in the deckhouse wall near the level of the deck and stuffed it full of butter, leaving a big, tempting pat on the outside. When Panayoti eventually found it and began to suck,

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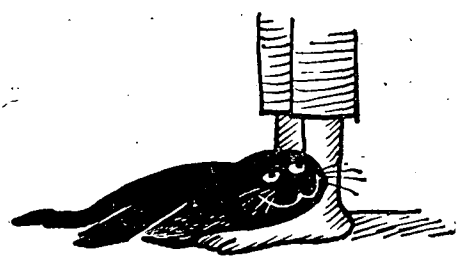
I dashed down into my cabin and very gently inserted the nipple of the milk bottle into the hole. Finally all the butter was gone, but Panayoti kept on sucking, and, triumph of triumphs, the milk in the bottle started going, at first slowly and then, as he got a taste for it, so fast that I thought for a minute the nipple had come off.

When I saw the last drops disappear I was exultant. I filled the bottle again and scrambled up on deck thinking that all I had to do now was offer Panayoti the bottle and he would feed. Not at all. The moment he saw it he set up an ungodly racket and crawled away. I tried all sorts of ruses. Nothing worked. It was mortifying and also extremely undignified. The original curiosity of the men was giving way to surreptitious sniggers.

So I decided to go to extreme lengths. I asked the carpenter to make a sort of wooden shield with a hole in the middle, which I stuffed with butter. For a couple of days I left it standing in the same place until Panayoti got used to it. Then I let him go for twenty-four hours without any butter until he was good and hungry. His complaints were heartrending, but I was adamant. On the following day I passed the nipple through the hole, covered the projecting end with butter and advanced upon Panayoti, hidden behind the shield. It was absurd but effective. Panayoti made a beeline for the butter and began to suck. No sooner had he taken one swallow than I pulled the bottle away and slid the shield aside. Panayoti gave a cry of anger and frustration, but before he could do anything else I stuck the nipple into his open mouth.

For a moment he looked surprised. Then he settled down to sucking steadily, eyes closed and a beatific expression on his face. That was the first time I saw Panayoti smile.

From that day on the feeding problem ceased to exist and he started gaining rapidly in size and strength. Our relationship also became much more intimate, not to say exclusive. Panayoti had at last become convinced that he had a friend in the world, and Panayoti was not a seal to do things by halves. His gratitude and affection were embarrassing. He would not let me out of his sight. When I was standing on deck, day or night, he would come and rest his head on my bare feet. If I moved he gave forth pathetic little moans.



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To avoid hurting his feelings I often found myself rooted to the same spot for what seemed like hours. To stumble into him, as I often did on dark nights, was a major calamity. It upset him terribly, and he would go on whimpering until he was picked up and comforted.

As his strength and devotion grew, he would not even let me go down into my cabin unescorted. When I was below for only a few minutes, laying a course or checking a bearing, he would get so restless and unhappy that he even overcame his dislike of heights. He would come to the open hatchway and cry.

If I paid no attention he would wriggle forward over the coaming until he overbalanced and slid forward down the ladder to land at my feet with a bump. I often watched him at it from between parted fingers. He obviously did not like doing it. He always looked miserable and reproachful as he prepared to take the plunge, and at the last moment just as he was about to tip forward, he always closed his eyes tight. But apparently being picked up and stroked was compensation enough.

The matter of getting out of the cabin up the almost perpendicular ladder was something else again. That he never mastered. He always had to be lifted out.

Sliding down into the cabin and setting up a to-do until he was taken out was nuisance enough, particularly if it happened at night when we were sailing and had to keep our ears open for the first, faint sound of enemy engines. But when he took to falling overboard every time I rowed away in the dinghy or went swimming over the side, it became really insufferable; for in spite of several unpleasant experiences, Panayoti had learnt neither how to swim nor the obvious truth that he couldn't. He had to be rescued from drowning every time.

I decided to teach him how to swim. Every morning after the schooner was moored against the rocks and camouflaged under nets, after the machine-guns were emplaced and lookouts posted, I took Panayoti in the dinghy to some secluded cover. First we began in the shallows with Panayoti barely awash. I would walk away on the beach following the edge of the sea, and Panayoti would try to wriggle after me, splashing and thrashing about in

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the foot-deep water. As often as not he would give up his allegedly native element and crawl out on the sand. If he didn't, the lesson usually ended up with his swallowing a mouthful of water and choking.

If I set him out on the sand and went and squatted in the water a few feet away, he would try to come to me. All went well until he got beyond the depth of his flippers. Then his head went down and he had to be pulled out by the tail. It never daunted him. After I had picked him up he would splutter for a while, then put his head on my shoulder and nuzzle my neck contentedly.

In spite of the disappointing results, I persevered with the lessons, using every method that I had ever heard of. I took him out beyond his depth and held him under the chin while swimming away backwards. In the beginning this seemed promising. He began to move his flippers in a reasonable imitation of a swimming stroke, and his tail assembly, that absurd appendage which on dry land looked more like the wet hem of a skirt than anything else, became an admirably contrived instrument of propulsion. The trouble was his head. Whenever I let go of him it sank like a piece of lead and his tail beat uselessly in the air. I even strapped a Mae West on him, but he was so slippery in the water that after a few minutes it worked loose, and he slid out of it head-first to assume his usual perpendicular position.

Then one night we had an unpleasant experience. We were making a long crossing to one of the more distant islands, in company with another schooner, and we were caught in the open by a German Ems Craft. Being shelled at night on the sea by a more powerful enemy vessel against which you have no means of retaliating is very unnerving. We spent a desperate half-hour dodging right and left until the Germans lost us in the darkness.

In the morning when we had made port, the atmosphere on the schooner was distinctly ominous. Much as I tried to laugh it off it was clear that the crew attributed the previous night's alarms to the presence of a seal aboard. This was a serious matter, for a discontented crew could mean disaster. I was a worried man when my fellow captain hailed me and invited me to go swimming. I put Panayoti in the dinghy and rowed across.

My friend and I discussed our narrow escape and my crew's disaffection as we swam slowly round and round, with Panayoti propped up in the dinghy's stern, watching our every movement. We got so engrossed in our conversation we did not realize the boat was drifting farther and farther away, until with a splash, Panayoti, unable to stand the separation any longer, slipped overboard. We dashed to rescue him, but he had disappeared. We dived and dived. There wasn't a trace of him.

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Then my friend pointed with his hand and shouted, " There he is! " A hundred yards away a little black head was bobbing up and down among the waves at the mouth of the cove. I was torn between a terrible sense of loss and the joy of knowing that Panayoti had come into his own at last. After all, I thought, this was the best, the only way, for it to end. I waved to him, and he disappeared.

My friend and I stood treading water, both of us wondering, I suppose, whether Panayoti was well enough equipped to face the challenge of the open sea, when, with a flurry of churning waves, his glossy head bobbed up between us. His face wore the broadest, most triumphant smile I have ever seen. He kept on looking from one of us to the other, his whiskers twitching with excitement, his round eyes opened wide as if to say, " You see, I've done it."

Then, as though he needed to prove the point, he dived, nipped me playfully in the calf and was off at such speed that I had hardly time to turn round before he had served my friend in the same way.

We tried to catch him but he always slipped between our fingers. He darted through our legs and brushed across our backs; he dived, he leapt out of the water, and every now and then he surfaced to look at us and make sure that we were enjoying it too. Then he'd be off again like a cockeyed torpedo. We spent a wildly exciting quarter of an hour until he got tired and came to me and put his flippers on my shoulders, wanting to be lifted back into the dinghy. From that time on the days became one long delight. We were in the water whenever we had a chance. From early morning Panayoti would start worrying me to take him swimming, and by nightfall we were both exhausted.

Fortunately the war in the Aegean was drawing to its close and all we had to do was follow the retreating Germans. Even so, fate had some further blows in store for us. A fierce gale sprang up one night and separated us from the rest of the flotilla. A man was injured falling from the mast. Another was killed in an encounter with a German patrol vessel. And the temper of the crew grew uglier and uglier.

One night while I was below they picked up Panayoti and dropped him overboard. I missed him half an hour later and much to their disgust put back and found him in the darkness by his cries. He had been desperately trying to keep up with us and was utterly exhausted.

The following day they sent a deputation to me to say the seal must go or else. I told them to be their age and sent them packing. But I don't know what would have happened if the war had lasted longer.

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Even so, I had a very hard time of it for the few remaining days. To make things worse Panayoti was growing teeth and he began to bite. It was all in fun, but it could be very painful. It was this new development which put an end to his career aboard one of His Hellenic Majesty's men o'war.

Our commanding officer was a brave and charming man, but somewhat pompous and with a passion for showing off. As we approached Athens he put his miserable little flotilla of raiding schooners through fleet manœuvres. Now that the danger of enemy aircraft was past he made us practise blue turns and white turns and lines ahead and lines abreast until our heads were spinning. Then, on the day of liberation when we anchored off Piraeus harbour, he went ashore and returned to carry out an inspection, accompanied by several dignitaries and some pretty lady friends. We had to pipe him aboard with our men in summer whites drawn up at the rail as if we were real warships and not filthy little wooden death traps.

The men were understandably angry. After so many years we were returning home as liberators, but instead of being allowed to go ashore we had to be stared at like strange animals and listen to a silly speech about the gratitude of our country.

It was at this stage that Panayoti intervened. The captain was delivering his oration when Panayoti crept up behind him and bit him smartly in the calf. There was a most undignified yowl of pain and the speech came to an abrupt end. The men had a hard time of it trying to hide their grins. Afterwards they came one by one, the boatswain first, and patted Panayoti on the head. The commanding officer said nothing at the time of the incident, but a few hours later I received a curt, formal signal ordering Panayoti ashore forthwith.

For one last time I tried to coax Panayoti into starting a new life on his own, but he would have none of it. So having no choice I decided to take him to Athens with me. Taxis were scarce and when we finally got one, seven of us piled into it. I sat in front with three others and with Panayoti on my lap. He was very curious and kept sticking his head out of the window the way dogs do.

When we arrived at my aunt's flat the maid who opened the door nearly fainted at the sight of the seal. My aunt too only managed to overcome her revulsion for a rather grimy Panayoti because of her great pleasure at seeing me return from the wars. But she put her foot down when I suggested that Panayoti should be bathed in the bathtub. We struck a compromise eventually, and a tin hip-bath was brought out to the balcony overlooking the street. Panayoti hated getting soap in his eyes and started an

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awful rumpus. The strange bleatings attracted the attention of the people sitting on their balconies in the flats above my aunt's, and they leaned over to see what it was all about. The sight of so many people staring at something that was going on above the street intrigued the passers-by and soon a large enough crowd had formed in the street below to block the traffic. Drivers, after honking their horns for a while, got out and joined the others.

The people in the street started calling up to those in the balconies above, "What is it?" The people in the balconies answered, "We're not sure. We think it's a seal."

And presently the whole crowd started shouting in unison, "Show us the seal!" When I had rinsed Panayoti, I picked him up from behind and he bowed to the people of Athens right and left as if he were a young prince. He was roundly applauded.

Perhaps for many of those people he was as good a symbol as any for the end of the occupation. A seal being bathed on a balcony may not be what one ordinarily conceives of as a return to normal, but it was certainly a departure from the grim mood of the previous years.

A few days later I was ordered to go on a patrol to the north where the Germans were still fighting a rear-guard action.

I took Panayoti to my mother and settled him with her in our home in the country, where we built him a kennel next to the little lake so that he could enjoy his swim.

A very great lion, not swimming after the manner of a beast with the motion of his feet, nor yet diving sometimes under water and rising again (as porpoises and dolphins do) but rather gliding on the water with his whole body except legs in sight, shunned not the ship, nor the mariners, who presented themselves in view, but, turning his head to and fro, yawning and gaping wide, made a horrible roaring. It is conceived no spectrum or apparition, but a real fish; seeing we read that such a lion in all lineaments was taken at sea, anno 1282, and presented to Pope Martin the fourth.

RICHARD HAKLUYT, *Principall Navigations*, 1598

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THE DARLING OF HER HEART

A red hair across the pillow
—courting, were they?

BY RHYS DAVIES

THE key of the cottage lay hidden in its customary place under the lavender clump beside the front porch. She unlocked the door and found everything as usual in the dusky living-room, its odour of Saturday-morning wax-polishing still mingled with the scent of bunched herbs maturing under the pitted ceiling beams. The burnished brass candlesticks and the cherished pieces of old china on dresser and in cabinet were undisturbed; not a petal had fallen from the bowl of damask roses on the tawnily gleaming table. Nevertheless, all the house was desecrated.

As if following the intuition of her roused nose, its bird's curve quiveringly alert, Sian Prosser darted up the staircase of ancient oak rising direct from the living-room. She went into one of the two spick-and-span front rooms.

A taut, small-assembled woman of sixty, in whose autumnal brown face the eyes had become blazingly renewed, she stood by the single-size bed for two or three minutes, while the sunset light thickened to a violet hue at the window. She stood as though gone into a trance in which unimpeachable knowledge was being given her.

Suddenly, and with furious speed, she stripped the bed, taking the two blankets, the sheets, the pillow, and bolster out to the landing and hurling them down the stairs. Next she dragged the mattress down the stairs, and into the back garden. Getting the mattress through the gate into the rough, lumpy field behind the cottage was quite a task. After placing it over a molehill, so that air could circulate beneath it, she sped to fetch the pillow, bolster, sheets, and blankets. Made locally, the blankets were of excellent Welsh flannel, which lasts for generations. She piled all on the humped mattress.

Finally, she ran for a can of paraffin oil from the kitchen, liberally sprayed the big heap, and struck a match.

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Flames spread over the heap with a soft, eating pleasure. Sian did not wait; the evening dew on the grass would prevent the flames spreading over the field. Back in the cottage, she peered up at the clock. Over an hour remained before The Rising Sun would close its doors.

Everybody's social—and indeed private—habits are known in small country villages. Catrin Lloyd would be alone in her cottage until about half past ten. Sian hastened out, replacing the key under the lavender bush.

Hatless, walking with the trot of a vigorously small woman out on an important errand, she climbed a road bordered with fields in which, here and there, a farm cottage nestled. The Rising Sun, which she passed, lay cosily sunk in a fruiting apple orchard. Her own husband and the husband of the woman she was about to visit were inside it drinking together with the other village men in Saturday-night freedom from woes. Not once had her husband picked a quarrel with Catrin's husband. But men were weak in such matters.

Arrived on the hill's crown, where, had she not been so heated, dowdy St. Teilo's church might have reminded her of Christian forbearance, Sian paused a moment. She looked back and, like Lot's wife, saw a glowing red confusion in the field behind her cottage. She resumed her trot with a pinched smile.

A few lights began to gleam in windows of the cottages scattered spaciously in the well-ordered domain down the other side of the hill. Nobody else trod the road. At the bottom of the hill she turned off into a lane smelling of meadow-sweet and clover, and at last came to a thatched, bulgy-walled old cottage.

Above its front flower garden, the twilit cottage stood pretty as a calendar picture, though in daylight it showed decayed and tumbledown, the thatch unkempt as the hair of the slut dwelling within. As her feet skipped up the garden path Sian could see, beyond an uncurtained window, an oil lamp burning inside. The window-sill was crowded with sickly potted plants, and, for some reason, Sian gave a grimace at sight of these: she had already peered contemptuously at the waiflike plants and bushes in the garden.

She gave the door a peremptory blow with her fist, lifted the latch without delay, and entered. It was her first visit to this cottage of Catrin's married life, and, intent on her errand though she was, her glance swept disdainfully over the gimcrack contents of the living-room. The front door opened into it immediately.

"Catrin Morgan," commanded the visitor, using the maiden surname with a grimly pointed return to the past, "get your feet out of that water and stand up."

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Catrin, who was giving her feet their Saturday-night soaking in a bowl on the hearth-rug, astonishingly obeyed this hectoring order. At sight of Sian, the jaw of her big, round, nefarious face had dropped. Her milky eyes sidled as she dried her feet in a ragged towel and reached, bulkily, for her slippers.

During this, a stream of calmly-enunciated opinion came from Sian. She compared her erstwhile friend, not to the beasts of the field, which country people respect, but to villainesses of biblical and local fame, and she used adjectives applicable to evil human failings.

Catrin seemed unaffected by these preliminaries. "Marching in!" she mumbled. An imposing but pulpy woman standing five or six inches taller than her opponent, she rose, and added, "What do you want, Sian *Williams*?" Her own retaliatory use of Sian's maiden surname blew away not only forty years of married life, but a silence of the same period.

"*You know why I've come.*"

A large oval table stood between them. On it rested the oil lamp, its glass funnel unwashed for many a week. Catrin, her pale eyes absorbing without expression the menace shooting from those of the structurally inferior woman opposite her, groped for her dentures on the mantelpiece and slipped them in. Possession of them seemed to give her a little more confidence, for she protested, with a certain amount of indignation, "There's a knocker on my door. Marching in!" Perhaps it was shock that curtailed her and made her seem halted in stupor.

Sian, taking a short step round the table, came to the matter in hand. "You set her on him! A stoat on a young rabbit! Your red-haired daughter on *my* son!" She gave a quick yelp, such as a terrier might release. "Plotting it all in revenge on me! No doubt you're hoping he gets her into trouble, so that he's got to marry her. *My* Oliver! *Your* Muriel! Ha!"

She took another step, and another, round the table, while Catrin, in obedient rhythm, backed round it. During Sian's next pronouncements they moved thus, in the manner of some solemn folk-dance figure, twice round the table.

"You plotted with your Muriel to do her business even in my house! To spite me! I saw them coming out when I came back early from my married daughter—*you* know I go to see her every Saturday evening, while my husband is in The Rising Sun and Oliver supposed to be gone on his bike to the cinema in Morpedd, the house locked up and the key under the lavender bush—*you* know it all, and set your red-haired daughter to Delilah tricks with my son. *You* know he's my favourite, the darling of my heart—"

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There was no hauteur, insult, or mockery in her manner, only a bristling condemnation born of long breeding and decent taste.

But still Catrin's faculties seemed to be entirely occupied in obediently, if warily, backing a step in unison with Sian's approach round the table, and still no word of denial or retaliation had come from her. All she said, repetitiously, was, " Marching in! "

" For a month I've been smelling that something like this was going on. So I came back early tonight from my married daughter's house, an hour before my usual time. I saw them coming out when I was up on the main road. They went down into Bruchan Lane. Courting, are they? " Sian's beak darted towards the culprit she stalked, a degree faster, round the table. " A red hair on the pillow! I burnt the bed in the field . . ."

She allowed herself a menacing hiss as her hand moved towards the lamp . . . " As I'll burn down this sty of a house, with you in it punched to Jericho, if that daughter of yours gives another look at my boy! See? "

Without further ado, she made a leap, head down, towards the momentarily paused woman. Accurate as a goat, she butted her head under Catrin's chin. There was a clicking sound of dentures sharply meeting. Otherwise, a choked gasp was all that Catrin manifested. But she backed a foolish step, thus allowing Sian space to take another leap and repeat the butt.

Grunting and backing, Catrin flung out her arms. The main features of her face, blurred in fat, expressed an alarmed demise of the shifty elements governing her character. The physical pain of assault is trivial compared with the revelatory power of its criticism, and blows—the only method, unfortunately, in some cases—are also a short cut to clarification of a disputatious matter.

Catrin's girlhood friend had gone into action once more, and she knew what she was about.

" Now you can put your feet back in that water," she pronounced, still amazingly brisk of wind.

Catrin, an expiring heap of plump mounds and flabbergasted limbs, collapsed into the fireside armchair. It was guilt again. Also, after forty years of silence, the incident was a tremendous recognition of undying bondage.

Sian trotted to the door, looked back over her shoulder with a single threatening glance, and whisked out like a fox with dismissing celerity in its tail.

In the garden she heard a bellow. It came from delayed shock all of Catrin's faculties moved cumbersomely. In the lane, additional bellows could be heard, swelling and lowing. Yet they

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were not truly agonized. Did they contain, besides hints of recovery, an undercurrent of satisfaction?

She got home with time to spare. A quarter of an hour later, Oliver walked in. His father would be there in a few minutes. It was their customary Saturday-night arrival, in circumstances and time, for supper and bed.

Sian gave her son a fair preliminary hint. " You didn't go to the cinema in Morpedd?" she said absently, without blunt questioning. " When I came back from Barbara's I saw your bike in the shed."

He sat down and took off his shoes, which had been beautifully polished by her and were now dust-spattered. " I went for a walk with Ivor to the farm," he said, " to see his new sheep-dog."

Glad of the lie, which showed a proper sense of uneasiness, she said nothing and went on preparing the supper table. Oliver pulled on the soft calfskin slippers which had been a present from his mother on his nineteenth birthday a month ago. None of her other children had obtained such tributes as he enjoyed. She eyed him once or twice as she laid down crockery. He lit a cigarette without looking at her, but he went so far as to mention the price of the new sheep-dog. She only said, " Ah! "

As she passed him, a frail breeze of opposition must have reached him. " Ivor asked me to help in the trials," he mumbled, still on the dog. She smiled at the back of his auburn head.

Oliver was her best and different one, the last flower of her season. Particularly she delighted in his pale, well-bred little ears; her four other children, now out in the world, owned big purplish ones like their father. Oliver, by her determined efforts, had been put out to superior employment as a clerk in the Morpedd Rural Council offices; barring setbacks, he would never follow the agricultural pursuits of his family. But did his melancholy fine-cut nostrils still quiver at the aroma of ploughed soil? That he had responded to the wiles of Catrin's daughter, whose rufus hair was of a kind common in several unredeemed families of the district, deepened her suspicion that his physical delicacy was only a brittle shell.

When Prosser stumbled in, pompously holding his ham-shaped head erect, as always in liquor, she fetched the minced-liver faggots from the kitchen oven. At the same time she reiterated the scolding of hundreds of Saturday nights. He accepted it as his due, only interjecting a doomed " Ay," and " True, true! " and " Correct as a tombstone, Sian," his florid face smokily matured. His son sat waiting, slim legs stretched out, contrastingly not yet crystallized in his being.

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" Well, come to the table, both of you," Sian said.

She sat there in the quiet yellow lamplight. Her well-kept dishes shone, the hearth was shinily black as an empress housewife could make it; the herbs festooned on the beams sent down a pleasing odour to the delicious faggots which contained, together with apple and onion, a sprinkling of them. Even the clock under its porcelain garland of cherub-borne flowers, seemed to tick in clear approval of its habitation.

At the table, Prosser's insecure attention became focused. At the side of his plate, instead of the usual everyday cup and saucer, stood a painted china mug. It had been taken from the glass cabinet of never-used domestic treasures.

He gazed at the ceremonious piece in thunderstruck silence while Sian, talking of her routine visit to their daughter, dished out the Saturday-night faggots. Did she, at the end of the meal, intend pouring tea into that old mug painted with medallions of a crowned king and queen? At the side of her own and Oliver's plates rested an ordinary cup and saucer.

Presently she scooped an extra faggot onto her son's rapidly emptied plate. " Oliver," she prattled absently, " walked with Ivor to the farm to see the new sheep-dog. A long walk! "

Prosser, in his stupor betraying the son whom he too admired, said with surprise, " Ivor was in The Rising Sun with the sheep-dog all the evening."

Oliver bent over his faggot to hide his flush. Sian gave a squeezed-in laugh that made both father and son wince. " I expect Oliver has started courting then," she said. " They often tell lies at first, as if they're doing something wrong."

" I did go walking," Oliver muttered, head still over his plate.

Prosser, more himself after food, began to spread himself. " Is it Gwyneth Vaughan? " he boomed up to the beams. Going sententious, perhaps because he was a churchwarden of St. Teilo's and it was Sunday tomorrow, he rumbled on: " We all got to come to it. *Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a . . .*"

" Be quiet, Joseph Prosser! " his wife put a stop to this. " Mixing up the funeral service with the marriage one! "

" *I will keep my mouth as it were with a bridle*," he quoted further, however.

She rose and fetched the teapot from the hearth. Holding the pot high, but with a hand so accurately steady that the pouring seemed baleful, she filled the mug. The jet of dark tea descended to the mug, long and thin as a whip. Prosser watched it go into the receptacle.

Sian then walked round the table to her son. But he refused

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tea. He sat looking remote now, if not offended, and also not fully adjusted to whatever rankled within him. He got up. A waxen pallor had replaced the flush in his face. His mother did not question the unusual refusal of tea.

" I'm going to bed," he mumbled.

He went to the dresser cupboard for his candlestick, lit it, and tramped up the stairs without another word, taking his mystery with him.

Prosser sat with eyelids down, palms crossed over his stomach like a meditating monk, not touching the mug of tea. He waited until his son was safely in his room before saying, " You've got to face it, Sian, my girl. You can't keep him to yourself for ever. I wonder is it Gwyneth Vaughan? She's always hanging round him in St. Teilo's." It would be a desirable match. Gwyneth was sole offspring of a reasonably well-off family.

Sian assembled the table dishes. " Gwyneth is a nice girl," she said, in full approval. " Aren't you going to drink your tea? "

" Don't hurry me, Sian," he said, not looking at the mug.

She had taken two journeys to the kitchen with dishes before Oliver, candlestick still in hand, began to descend the stairs. His mother crossed to the table as though unnoticing. He put his feet down with slow care, stopped on the bottom stair, and asked, " Where's my bed? "

" I burnt it," his mother said, sugar-basin in hand.

The only sound came from Prosser's scratching of his walnut-shell cheek. He stared fixedly at the mug. Then the extraordinariness of the two events seemed to penetrate him with considerable force. " Why have you burnt Oliver's bed? " he demanded, even aggressively.

Oliver, sensing mysterious support, stood behind his candle, looking glassy as a young saint in a church window.

" Yes," he said, though there was an under-squeak of dread in his voice, " and where am I to sleep? "

Sian laid the sugar-basin on the table, and spun round fast as a weathercock in a sudden blast of wind. She faced both the men in turn. " That bed is burnt in the field! " she rapped out. " And I've been to Catrin Morgan's house tonight and knocked the wickedness out of *that* plotting old witch! See? "

To her husband she exploded, " Like mother, like daughter! And like father, like son! That daughter of Catrin's was in this house tonight! With *him*! But never again while I've got an ounce of strength to pull the trigger of your gun, Joseph Prosser . . . And you, Oliver," she rasped to her overcome son, totally unlike the woman who purred in ministration to his every wish

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and need, " no more from *you*! Get up to bed in the back room—and," she added, " don't forget to fall down on your knees by it and ask forgiveness before you set foot in St. Teilo's tomorrow! " In a white surplice, perfectly starched and ironed by her, he sang a pure tenor in the choir.

The candle unsteady before him, Oliver returned up the stairs at once.

A silence, bleak but seemly, followed Sian's outburst. Prosser moved from the table and the accusatory mug. He unlaced his size-eleven boots, bending from the armchair at his solidly established hearth. Sian held out the painted mug to him.

" You haven't drunk your tea," she said, with her pinched smile. " You'll be thirsty in bed, after all those salty faggots." She went off to the kitchen to wash up.

He drank the cooled tea with pondering slowness. The clock, flouting its heirloom age, ticked with a speedy clarity which always seemed to him mysteriously united with Sian's unwearied energy. Women, he ruminated, could seldom forget mischief done to them, however petty; and they had to be humoured; unlike men, they were unable to accept certain worldly matters with calm.

Yet, as he remembered the gala Coronation Day of 1911, part of him seemed to become Sian. He experienced an approximation of her scorching fury on that day. That was what long marriage did to one, he thought: a bit of one became like a woman.

Burning a good bed! But he experienced the drastic fury of that act too. He also heard a connecting explosion of fireworks. He remembered the laden tables in the meadow behind St. Teilo's, the gay marquee, the barrels of strong ale, the games and competitions, the commemorative mugs, painted with the crowned heads of King George and Queen Mary, which were presented to every villager by Sir Llewellyn's wife on that 1911 afternoon.

He remembered how, after dark had fallen, Catrin Morgan wheedled him—yes, wheedled him—into the copse below the meadow, when everybody's attention was on the opening of the fireworks display.

He had been drunk by then, and it seemed only a minute before Sian leapt in on them, snatched up Catrin's coronation mug from the grass, and smashed it to pieces on her red head. From where he lay, pushed over disregarded on the ground, he saw a soaring rocket burst into blue stars and fiery rain. He and Sian weren't married then, of course; only courting.

She came in from the kitchen, too briskly, and asked, " Finished your tea? "

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" Men," he said, still pondering, " they don't mean to do harm. They only get helpless in their nature. A man goes weak in the joints sometimes, and his mind goes dark . . . yes," he brooded, " dark." He handed her the drained mug.

Her nose quivering over these obscurities, she observed, " It's a good thing a woman stands watching from the other pan of the scales, then."

Prosser continued to stare up at the pitted ceiling beams as he went on, " Something there is that tells a man to take advantage of what's going." He added, " It's nothing serious, Sian."

" What! " she exclaimed, thunderstruck.

" Not in young men, Sian," he said in some haste. " Their heads are in the clouds and they can't see plainly what's going on below."

" You mean," she clarified for him, not displeased by this parental concern, " Oliver hasn't been wicked on purpose, bringing that fire-haired demon into the house. Well, I didn't say *he* was wicked. But *someone* had to fetch his head down out of the clouds."

" Well, you've put the fear of God into all concerned now, Sian." He suppressed a belch, but managed to add, with some assertion of justice, " She isn't a bad little whelp, on the whole, that girl isn't. But not suitable for Oliver, of course, of course."

" Oh, go up to bed," she said, only impatient, sure of her power in her own important territory.

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" I can't place your name, but your face has a familiar ring."

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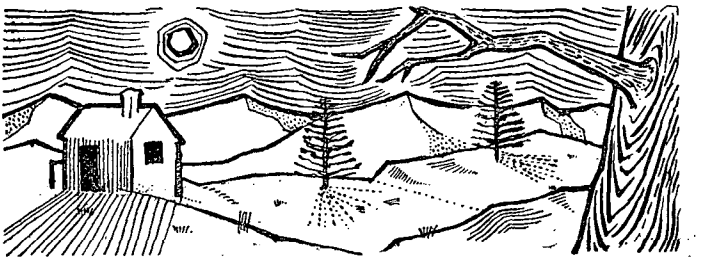

White Weather

But the snow carries me
on her shoulders of jasper . . .
pero me lleva la nieve
sobre su espalda de jaspe . . .

F. GARCIA LORCA, *Monologo de la Luna*

Snow Lady

By the morning of Christmas Eve, snow had fallen. Sebastian was amused by this, when he first looked out of his bedroom window and saw the white garden. He was amused, because Teresa would now see Chevron as she had expected to see it. " Quite an old-fashioned Christmas," she would say . . .

Snow had ceased to fall; it was freezing hard; the lying snow was in admirable condition.

Sebastian, John, and Teresa went out in hearty spirits. Teresa, moreover, was looking deliciously pretty, dressed in a tight bolero of stamped velvet, a sealskin cap on her head, and her hands buried in a little sealskin muff. She tripped gaily between them, chattering, and turning her happy face from one to the other.

This was better than London, she said; snow got so dreadfully dirty in London, and before you knew where you were it had all turned to slush. She chattered on, while John and Sebastian

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chose a site for their snow-man . . . Even the taciturn John expanded; he displayed himself as quite a competent sculptor, modelling a lady's bust and paring away the snow at her waist, till Sebastian cried out that if he made her any more like an hour-glass she would snap in half; while Teresa arranged the lady's train on the ground, and scolloped the snow into flounces. Kneeling on the ground, her face glowing beneath her sealskin cap, she laughed up at Sebastian as she beat her hands together to shake the snow from her gloves.

V. SACKVILLE-WEST, *The Edwardians*

Snow Light

There is a light
About the snow
That differs from
The accustomed glow
When mornings come
And evenings go.

Noon on Saturn
Could not give
This aureole in
Which we live,
This atmosphere
So fugitive.

Strange as an
Eclipse, it lays
A silverness
Across the days—
Pellucid blue
And platinum haze.

And when the children
Come to sled
And streak the park
With paths of red,
We start, as from
A dream in bed.

HARVENA CONRAD RICHTER

Snow-White, Rose-Red

And in the evening he entered a valley, and at the head of the valley he came to a hermit's cell, and the hermit welcomed him gladly, and there he spent the night. And in the morning he arose, and when he went forth, behold a shower of snow had fallen the night before, and a hawk had killed a wild fowl in front of the cell. And the noise of the horse scared the hawk away, and a raven alighted upon the bird. And Peredur stood, and compared the blackness of the raven and the whiteness of the snow, and the redness of the blood, to the hair of the lady that best he loved, which was blacker than jet, and to her skin which was whiter than the snow, and to the two red spots upon her cheeks, which were redder than the blood upon the snow appeared to be.

The Mabinogion

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White Night

Arise, arise, my Juggy, my Puggy,
Arise, get up, my dear;
The weather is cold, it blows, it snows,
Oh, let me be lodged here.
My Juggy, my Puggy, my honey, my coney,
My love, my dove, my dear;
Oh, oh, the weather is cold, it blows, it snows;
Oh, oh, let me be lodged here.

Return, return, my Willy, my Billy,
Return, my dove, and my dear;
The weather doth change, then seem not strange,
Thou shalt be lodged here.
My Willy, my Billy, my honey, my coney,
My love, my dove, my dear;
Oh, oh, the weather doth change, then seem not strange,
Oh, oh, and thou shalt be lodged here.

THOMAS HEYWOOD, *Changeable Weather*

Drifting and Sifting

And even now it must be snowing—it was going to be a snowy day—the long white ragged lines were drifting and sifting across the street, across the faces of the old houses, whispering and hushing, making little triangles of white in the corners between cobblestones, seething a little when the wind blew them over the ground to a drifted corner; and so it would be all day, getting deeper and deeper and silenter and silenter.

CONRAD AIKEN, *Silent Snow, Secret Snow*

Dazzle

She, then, like snow in a dark night,
Fell secretly. And the world waked
With dazzling of the drowsy eye,
So that some muttered "Too much light,"
And drew the curtains close.
Like snow, warmer than fingers feared,
And to soil friendly;
Holding the histories of the night
In yet unmelted tracks.

ROBERT GRAVES, *Like Snow*

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MURDER ON ORDER

Suddenly the floor of the plane seemed paper-thin

BY THOMAS WALSH

ON the flight from Rome, there was no sensation of speed for Robert, and no weather. It seemed to him that they floated ahead tranquilly, with only a long, gentle glide now and again, in some new and rather overwhelming dimension of high space. Seven o'clock passed, seven-thirty, a quarter to eight; and then, over Ireland, they dipped down into another world of sea-green shadow and into a window smudge of thick but colourless March rain.

In the seat in front, old Fitzpatrick straightened himself now, peering out at the rain and murmuring something or other to the girl beside him. Then he glanced back at Robert, the famous Fitzpatrick hat with its bright feather and gaily pointed Tyrolean crown giving him not the air of distinction he must have expected of it, but a rather pathetic raffishness.

He narrowed weary old eyes under white eyebrows while shifting his blackthorn stick; and Rose Margaret Fitzpatrick studied quietly but anxiously the distinguished face of the old man. He seemed shut off from her—and from everyone else too—by his own brand of unmistakable hauteur.

They had descended farther by this time, with a few lights visible down there, oddly tilted against the queer-looking upward slant of open water and dim, night-coloured woods. They dropped quickly now—Robert felt the usual faint queasiness as they touched down—and raced ahead into thick dusk; then there were the airport buildings outside, and Flight 903, Rome to New York, checked itself, trundled forward again, and began edging round towards the landing platform. Old Fitzpatrick unbuckled his seat belt, and Rose Margaret leaned forward to smooth the overcoat on his shoulders. He twitched off that attention immediately, quite in character.

"Can't you leave me alone?" he demanded, openly irritated here by such evidence of public and therefore highly embarrassing concern for him. "Haven't I asked you before—asked you and asked you? Don't worry me!"

She coloured a little; a slim, coolly composed girl with black hair and fine, luminous grey eyes. Perhaps she was conscious at that

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moment of young Mr. Robert Kelliher, from the district attorney's office, standing behind them.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to annoy you, Papa."

"Ah, you didn't," Fitzpatrick told her, his lips curling. "It's never your intention at all, is it? Only—" His tone revealed sudden and ugly malice—"can I do this for you, Papa?" He whined out the words, directing the question not at her but at Robert, in a venomous and mocking singsong. "Can I do that for you, Papa? Yes, Papa; no, Papa." He smiled grimly. "Ah, thank God," he said. "Haven't I the luck of the world, sir? Haven't I the devoted and long-suffering child?"

Yes, Robert thought quietly, haven't you? He said nothing, however, and showed nothing. They went out then, old Fitzpatrick clearing an arrogant way at the plane door with his blackthorn stick.

Up forward, all alone in another seat behind the pilots' compartment, the last remaining passenger on Flight 903 buttoned his grey overcoat while asking an apparently casual question of the plane steward. Would they be here long?

"No, sir," the steward assured him. "An hour or so, that's all. Just long enough to fuel up."

An hour, the passenger told himself. Well, he had known that before—made quite certain of it in Rome this morning—but it never hurt, of course, to recheck important matters of that kind. Turning back to his seat as if he had forgotten something, he opened a canvas flight bag that was lying there; then he adjusted something inside quickly and carefully, fastened the bag again, and put it up on the rack under a couple of magazines and a wool blanket.

The steward followed him out, closing the plane door after them; and in a minute or so the big airliner circled round from the landing platform with earthbound sluggishness. A streak of light from outside flashed in across vacant seats, a rumpled pillow or two, a child's toy; and last of all on the blanket covering that flight bag. There was no sound audible from under the blanket, however; the mechanism now ticking away in there was as noiseless and as precisely adjusted as the finest wristwatch.

The man who had adjusted it paused briefly at the foot of the landing ladder.

"Bad night, sir," the steward remarked amiably. "That rain's really coming down, isn't it?"

The man in the grey overcoat glanced at him with small and satiny-looking brown eyes. He spoke quietly, with his usual low-pitched huskiness. "I wouldn't worry about that, my boy," he said. "Not about the weather . . ."

Standing in the long, wide hall given over to various airline agencies, the man in the grey overcoat could see on his left the one authorized exit that led out to the public waiting-room. That exit was guarded now by a ruddy-faced Irish policeman.

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He glanced at it with the satiny brown eyes. Of course, he thought, Flight 903 had stopped off here only to prepare itself for the long overseas hop to Iceland, or Gander, and perhaps to take on one or two additional passengers for America. Which meant, naturally, that there would be no mingling permitted with the public part of the building; and that, for the next hour or so, passengers in transit would be required to keep entirely by themselves in the transit waiting-room. Well, just as he'd anticipated, wasn't it?

He went on casually into a wide, spacious chamber, brightly lit and well filled at this moment by a hundred or more other passengers. But that too was what he had counted on: plenty of company now. The early evening was the busy part of the night here —planes arriving and planes leaving, passengers strolling about inquisitively, others lining up every so often, with their hostess, at the proper departure time.

Now the man in the grey overcoat saw that Mr. John Desmond Fitzpatrick had sat down in a far corner of the waiting-room; that the daughter was hovering around him solicitously; and that the young fellow who had sat behind them from Rome—kind of legal-looking with his leather briefcase and his dignified black moustache —was talking near the bulletin board to a big, spare man, not a passenger on Flight 903, who had apparently been waiting for him in here.

It was a sudden and unexpected development, but being well trained, of course, and skilled in his speciality—extermination to order, and for hard cash—the man in the grey overcoat was not stupid enough to show any surprise. He was unable to recognize the big man in the blue suit by name, as an individual, but he spotted his profession at once, through unerring and quick instinct.

Had the big man recognized him in the same way? That was the point. Moving ahead idly after the plane steward, the man in the grey overcoat scrutinized the other with his accustomed air of weary disgust, of bored truculence; while the other, listening attentively to what the young fellow was saying to him, returned that look in a vacantly thoughtful manner.

That was only to be expected, the man in the grey overcoat cautioned himself. His own shrewdness and capacity were well matched here, and if the big man had any ideas of his own, he would very sensibly reserve those ideas until he had decided on a suitable course of action. Just now, whatever he might have wanted to do, he was pretty helpless. The man in the grey overcoat had no gun on him, and nothing else suspicious; his passport carried the right stamps, if not the right name; and he had already, before the big man could possibly have any suspicion of it, made all the necessary arrangements about an eleven-o'clock appointment for Mr. John Desmond Fitzpatrick.

So he did not worry unduly—not about himself and not about all those other passengers on Flight 903. He had nothing against them personally, not a thing, and, of course, he was only minding

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his own business. That was the way Jack Eiler had always looked at it, and he played a lone hand. Now he stopped right in front of the big man in the blue suit and lit a cigarette; then, again casually, headed for the cocktail lounge.

The big man paid no attention to him. He had been listening to Robert, but now he rocked a little, slowly and thoughtfully on outsize black shoes.

"So," he remarked, blinking baby-solemn blue eyes over old-fashioned square spectacles, "so you got nowhere at all in Rome yesterday, not with Lord Johnny Fitzpatrick. Well, we might have expected it. Thumped the blackthorn, I suppose? Roared out at you the minute you opened your mouth? And behaved himself, all in all, like the high-toned and untouchable gentleman of four years ago?"

Robert had dropped his coat on a chair and his hat over it. Now he shrugged slightly. He was a reserved young man, quiet in dress, and usually very reserved in speech and action, but at that moment he felt uncomfortably aware that none of this had any effect on Inspector Martin Mulready.

"I suppose that's about it," he agreed. "What he told me was that he's only coming home for a medical check-up—and that he had no statement to give anyone from our office or from yours either. Well, I couldn't argue about that part. He looks bad, doesn't he?"

"Did you imagine he wouldn't?" Mulready grunted. He had sandy hair and a few faint freckles, big, clean-looking hands; and—this always, the one detail about him that Jack Eiler had detected immediately and beyond question—a manner of the most judicious and deliberate authority. "He's a cunning old fox, remember—and well aware of the importance of public sympathy. But who's that talking to him over there? The girl, is it—the daughter?"

"The daughter," Robert nodded, trying to be very offhand. "Rose Margaret. And nothing like him, Inspector—nothing at all. You should have heard him flaring out at her on the plane—and for no reason."

"Oh," Mulready said. "I should, should I?" He made it the most disinterested of inquiries, and yet Robert felt a prickle of heat on the back of his neck and at the tips of his ears.

"All I managed to find out from him yesterday afternoon," he said, "was that the two of them were coming home on tonight's plane, so I hustled round and made a reservation on it. Then I wired the office right away. They telephoned you, I suppose?"

A stocky young man with broad shoulders, snapping black eyes, and short but crisply curling black hair stopped beside them, put a cigarette in his mouth and spoke around it to Inspector Mulready, with almost no movement of his lips.

"The sharpie in the grey overcoat . . ." he said. "I got the air hostess to pick him out. He just went by on his way to the cocktail lounge. Did you spot him, Inspector?"

"Just about as quickly as he spotted me," Mulready said, apparently concentrating on a counter display of Irish linens and

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tweeds before them. "He'd have slipped straight off into the men's cloakroom if he'd wanted to get rid of anything; but he didn't, so he's got nothing on him to get rid of. All right then. We'll just give him a little rope, Eddie—because he'll watch me from now on, and not you. But don't lose him."

"Lose him?" Eddie said. "In here, Inspector? Hah!" He wandered off, and Martin Mulready, turning back again from the Irish linens, continued his other conversation with Robert as if no one had interrupted it.

"Yes, they phoned me," he said. "They would, of course, because it was big news when we heard that Lord Johnny Fitzpatrick was coming home at last, after four years in Rome. We had a bit of a talk about it, and then I was delegated to meet you over on this side. Now, what do you know about that fellow in the grey overcoat? Was he sitting near you on the plane this afternoon or near Lord Johnny?"

"What?" Robert said. "I don't think I even noticed him. Why? Who is he?"

"That's what's puzzling us," Mulready admitted. He pursed his lips, as if considering. "I managed to get a full passenger list from the airline today, and one of my chaps arranged for Captain Simmon to check it. He telephoned me about it not half an hour ago. You've got twenty-four Americans along with you—and twenty-three proper and accounted for. The fellow in the grey overcoat is down on it as Mr. William J. Anderson, of Albany, New York—only it seems that he's the invisible man over there. He's not known at the address he gave, but then the address itself doesn't exist, for that matter. Yet he managed a passport for himself in some way, and bought a ticket on Johnny Fitzpatrick's plane. Why? Out for trouble, do you suppose?"

"I don't know," Robert said. He glanced round uneasily.

"Nor I," Martin Mulready drawled out, giving him a dry and non-committal look. "Not yet, anyway. But you take a man who was as powerful and important in his day as Judge John Desmond Fitzpatrick; keep him over in Europe in a fine mansion in Rome for four years, well out of reach of a grand jury that might have wanted to ask him a question or two about his conduct in office; then let the word get round that he's on his way home again.

"What then? Maybe your grand jury has completed its investigation by this time, but this old devil could blow it all sky-high. Take just one example. That big fellow back in the States—the one who ran the slot machines and the bookmakers in Lord Johnny's heyday; the one who's fighting deportation now. He'd find himself in pretty deep water, with all the evidence in the world against him, if Lord Johnny could ever be induced to give testimony as to how and why a certain verdict was wangled in a certain murder trial. Would *he* take it for granted that Lord Johnny was coming home again only to see the doctors? Maybe it's true enough, and maybe it isn't. But can you see the big fellow taking any chances at all on it?"

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"Oh," Robert said, a few things becoming somewhat more clear to him, "so that's it. I delivered a personal letter to Fitzpatrick in Rome yesterday, from the boss. I didn't quite know why . . ."

"You do now," Mulready said. "And so does the big fellow we were just talking about, to my notion."

He was studying Fitzpatrick, who sat across from them with his head lowered, and the blackthorn stick over his knees. In that attitude he gave the impression of guarding carefully in himself a small glow of light, of warmth, and sentient reaction; of keeping it safe somewhere in the big body which hung as loosely and clumsily on him as a beggar's reach-me-down. Four years ago, as Robert remembered him, he had been a fine vigorous man, in his prime; but now he seemed a mere travesty of that other Lord Johnny—a dismal caricature with ragged white hair, haggard old features, and bitter, piercing grey eyes.

"That's another puzzle for us," Mulready went on. "What's the old devil prepared to admit out of all that he knows—and maybe out of all that he did too? I suppose I'll have to have a bit of a chat with him. Only keep the daughter away, will you? Talk to her, or get her a sandwich. She'd only complicate matters by being there."

He went off then, leaving Robert to hesitate uncomfortably behind him. There could be nothing significant, of course, between Robert Kelliher, that very junior assistant district attorney, and Miss Rose Margaret Fitzpatrick. Impossible! But in the few words that they had exchanged so far, and in the two days that they had known each other, it had seemed to him that she also might have felt some strong attraction, some obscure understanding between them.

Now she moved over with that cool elegance of hers to one of the windows at the end of the waiting-room, looking out at a garden or courtyard of some kind. He went over and stood behind her. "I thought you might like a drink," he began awkwardly. "Or a sandwich. There's a restaurant, you know."

She glanced at him. She seemed faintly surprised at the invitation. Her features were as distinct, as sharply and aristocratically cut, as the father's; and yet the impression they gave was very different. The mouth was gentle and sensitive, the grey eyes proudly self-contained, the throat very young and soft-looking.

"Perhaps later," she said composedly. "Not just now. But thank you."

Then she hesitated a moment. "And about what happened on the plane," she began again, with more effort. "It's not important, of course, but I wouldn't like you to—to imagine things. I'm not clever enough to explain Papa to anyone. But if I could—" She made the very smallest of inarticulate and perhaps distressed gestures, a slight movement of the hand as though to explain a matter altogether beyond words.

He murmured something or other. Before them Irish rain darted

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in hurried and erratic flusters, like anxious quicksilver, against the window glass. The girl watched it.

"I think he's a little upset," she said. "Perhaps it's just coming back here again to Ireland. He was born in one of the little towns on the north coast, and we used to come back for a visit every so often. But before—" she shivered delicately, as though chilled. "Well, that's over," she said. "He's sensitive about things; and, of course, that makes it very difficult for him. He needs people, needs the kind of life that he had. He was never contented alone—couldn't be, somehow. And now . . ." She moved suddenly and impatiently, something of the father's icy reserve showing in her. "I don't really understand why I'm talking to you like this. You're very quiet, aren't you? You never say much."

He smiled faintly. "Not all that quiet," he said, sure that the essential thing here would be not to force anything. "Not always. You used to come over with him on those visits, I suppose. Did you like Ireland?"

He was doing exactly what Martin Mulready had asked him to do—he was occupying the girl—and yet he knew that it wasn't altogether for that reason.

Over on the other side of the room, Mr. Jack Eiler emerged from the cocktail lounge. It was 8.25, getting on for the departure time of Flight 903. He reconnoitred his ground carefully, out of long habit, and decided that there wasn't anything very much to worry about. The big man in the blue suit was talking earnestly to John Desmond Fitzpatrick, and there was a small flurry of commotion around the corridor exit—with a group of passengers off a newly-arrived plane.

It was a very good moment for what Jack Eiler had to do. A final announcement was made over the loud-speaker system in Gaelic first, then in English, concerning an 8.30 plane; and people who had been waiting for it got up and began straggling out, one by one, into the corridor.

It was easy to mingle with them, and to keep them between him and Inspector Mulready. Out in the corridor, too, the big Irish policeman was now occupied with the passengers for the departing plane—and so no one paid any attention at all to Jack Eiler.

He paused by the customs exit, looking out at a sleek airliner with the landing platform against it, and flares of pale blue exhaust streaming away into windy darkness; then moved off from that point, ostensibly to inspect a travel folder hanging before one of the airline offices.

A young couple strolled up and down in the corridor, arm-in-arm; two pilots chatted near the public waiting-room; and a young man with curly black hair, obviously American, exchanged affable courtesies with a little Irish girl in a greenish-blue uniform.

Everything O.K., Eiler decided nervously; just as he wanted it. But how had he managed the thing so far? Any loopholes

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anywhere? Any item, however slight, that could possibly lead back later on to an efficient business man such as he was, who could not afford to make more than one mistake in his life.

The bag, now, he cautioned himself; had everything been in order there? Well, it was the ordinary kind issued gratis by the airline to all passengers, with no distinguishing marks on it, and, of course, he had not been so stupid as to risk carrying it himself through the Italian customs this afternoon.

Instead, after he had walked out onto the field at the Rome airport, an attendant there, or someone in an attendant's uniform, had paused beside him and set down the flight bag. That was the great advantage of doing an important job for important and well-known people. They had contacts everywhere, even in Rome, and those contacts made the whole matter very simple and easy.

Mr. Jack Eiler had knelt down as if to tie his shoe-lace; the attendant had wandered away in the last-minute hustle and bustle going on round Flight 903; and then Jack Eiler had picked up the bag casually and followed John Desmond Fitzpatrick step by step up the landing ladder. So the bag was O.K., and there was no doubt about Fitzpatrick continuing his trip in Flight 903.

The big man in the blue suit might be clever, but there was one fatal flaw in his reasoning. John Desmond Fitzpatrick's fate was not still to be decided: it had been decided already, and there was nothing that the big man—or fifty others like him—could do to change it.

Eiler moved farther along the corridor, glancing in at an office where two uniformed employees were busy with weather reports and overseas charts. They were in the last occupied and illuminated office along there. Beyond them were other rooms and other offices, but all closed now, and no clerks on duty. Eiler stopped before one of those abandoned counters, reached in as if for a travel folder of some kind—and then suddenly and quietly eased himself over.

He was out of sight of the waiting-room entrance—and of the Irish policeman. Had his departure been noticed? He waited in the darkness, his heart pumping rapidly. There were no cries after him, no one running this way. He gave a nervous grin. His heart slowed again.

There was a closed but unlocked door behind the counter. He opened it carefully, inch by inch, and found himself in a small private office with a desk, a chair or two, and a filing-cabinet. Behind the desk was a window, and beyond the window a wide, dark field, and a road with a few lights gleaming along it.

Eight-thirty-five, he told himself; right on the dot. But was that car waiting outside? It should be, as everything had been arranged for him in Ireland, too—the car, a quick trip to Dublin tonight, and then a reservation already made on the first morning flight to Paris.

In a few minutes now the hostess on Flight 903 would be searching frantically for a missing passenger—one Mr. William J.

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Anderson. But she would not find him, and in an hour or two there would be no one in all Ireland, or anywhere else, either, who would have even the faintest recollection of him.

Yes, he thought hurriedly, everything was set now; because after eleven o'clock, when the ticking stopped in that flight bag, and something else happened three or four miles up over the North Atlantic, and five hundred miles out, there would be no reason at all for Jack Eiler to concern himself about anyone, crew member or passenger, on Flight 903. That would present only another unexplained tragedy of the air, with no word of distress coming back from it, no wreckage and, of course, no survivors. And the man in the blue suit? He would be on that plane probably with John Desmond Fitzpatrick; so he also . . .

The window went up noiselessly. Rain swept under it at Jack Eiler; he hesitated a moment, not quite sure whether or not he had heard something in the outer office, then plunged over the sill into open darkness.

When he was quite close to the road, he paused, looking back without seeing anything moving. He relaxed somewhat. What was he so nervous about? Let the American police start nosing around in a couple of days after the mysterious Mr. William J. Anderson. They would have absolutely no description of him; and by that time, using another name and another passport, Jack Eiler would be safely home again in San Francisco, another job done and another nice cheque in the bank.

He came to a narrow stone walk. Ahead of him it curved back into the public entrance to the airport building, and there was a booth there with another policeman sitting in it and reading a newspaper. Then he saw a bus on the other side of the road, and a small English car parked beside it—a dark blue saloon with a man in a cap lounging against it in the rain and smoking a cigarette.

For a few moments he and the man regarded each other with alert wariness.

"You waitin' for somebody?" Eiler demanded in that soft whisper of his.

"That depends," the man said. "Could I inquire the destination you have in mind?"

Eiler moved forward, out of the shadow. "Dublin airport," he said. "That O.K.?"

The man cupped his cigarette in his hand, stared down at it for a moment very thoughtfully, and flipped it away. "Ah, it is," he said. "And why wouldn't it be? Get in, then."

Eiler got in. "Just take it easy," he advised huskily. "We've got all night to drive over there. Do they check you anywhere on the way out?"

"They give sort of a look into the car," the man said. "Then you keep down. We'll have no difficulty about that part."

He lit another cigarette, then opened the door on his side, but never closed it.

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Out of the darkness behind him there loomed the Irish policeman who had been sitting in the booth a few minutes ago.

"Now you'll both wait here a minute," the policeman announced stolidly, "because there's a few matters to check in regard to this conveyance. Who's the passenger in there—if you'll excuse the asking? And where did he come from?"

"Me?" Eiler said, bending forward to smile out innocently at the policeman, but at the same time fumbling behind him for the door handle. "I've been inside," he said, "seeing a friend off. I just—"

Then the door opened for him and he plunged out, shoving himself clear of the car by thrusting against it with both hands. But just as he turned, someone or something struck him very hard in the pit of the stomach, so that he collapsed into the door and slid helplessly onto the car seat. At once he was yanked up and forward.

All the lights in the airport pranced about dizzily, like swung flags; and the pavement lifted and flattened him out with a stupefying shock.

When his head cleared he saw two men bending over him. One was the young fellow with the curly hair, who must have hit him with such efficacious dispatch, and the other was the big man in the blue suit.

Eiler sat up groggily as the big man retrieved his hat out of the gutter. "What do you think you're doing?" he demanded breathlessly, his sharp face now flushed and vicious-looking. "Who d'you think you're knocking about?"

"I don't think I know," Inspector Mulready informed him, presenting the hat with a gesture of the most courteous affability. "Not yet, sir, but I intend to find out . . . All right, Eddie, give him a hand up, will you? Bring him along with us, if he's so disposed, but just see to it that he watches his step now, and minds his manners."

It was about twenty minutes later that the first announcement was made over the loud-speaker system concerning the departure of Flight 903. Then old Fitzpatrick hobbled out to the landing-field, supporting himself heavily against his daughter. Other passengers straggled behind, and Inspector Mulready appeared, maintaining what looked like an amiably persuasive grasp on a sullen though unresisting arm in a grey overcoat.

On the plane itself, with no outward melodrama, Jack Eiler was permitted to take over his old place just behind the pilots' compartment; the young man with the curly hair found a seat for himself exactly opposite, and at the other end of the plane, in the last seat but one, Robert and Mulready murmured together while adjusting their safety belts.

"Now, I'll tell you," Mulready confided, keeping his voice lowered so that, in the seat ahead, neither Fitzpatrick nor Rose Margaret could overhear. "All I could do was to give our fellow up there his pick of two choices. He could stay on in Ireland, I

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told him, and face charges there of attempting illegal entry, or he could finish his trip with us and answer a question or two in New York tomorrow. Because he was up to something, of course. You'd agree to that, wouldn't you?"

Probably so, Robert reflected uneasily—something, but what? Back there in a quiet corner of the waiting-room, the man in the grey overcoat had done nothing but adjust his shirtcuffs with casual insolence, whistle to himself, buff his fingernails; and on those sharp, sallow features of his only a tired disgust had been permitted to reveal itself. Let them talk, he had indicated contemptuously to Inspector Mulready; let them accuse him of whatever they wanted, and let them prove afterwards that he had any connection at all with John Desmond Fitzpatrick.

"Which might take more than a bit of doing," Mulready admitted now, polishing his spectacles on a cotton handkerchief. "A fellow like that would want a getaway laid on for himself; and the queer thing is that he even tried one—*before the event*. Does that strike you as significant in any way, Kelliher? Would you be able to draw any conclusions from it?"

"No, I'm afraid not," Robert said. "How did you get on with Fitzpatrick in that talk of yours? Is he ready to co-operate?"

"If he's made to," Mulready said. "But what form of compulsion could you use on the man?"

"I wish I knew," Robert said.

Mulready left it at that, wandering off presently to discuss something or other up forward; and from the seat in front of Robert, Rose Margaret got up to fetch some fresh water for the old man's medicine.

By this time they were beginning to climb steadily. Heavy clouds had closed in round them and above them, but soon Flight 903 was well over the clouds, and rocking gently in the heart of a serene spaciousness that led out on all sides. A new moon rested very low in the sky behind them, so that the plane shadow could be seen floating silently over profound white gulfs and snowy hummocks of immaculate softness.

Rose Margaret came back again. "I wanted to talk to you," she said to Robert, keeping her voice down, "and Papa's trying to sleep now. So I thought—would you mind very much if I sat down here for a few minutes?"

"Of course," he said. "Please do."

Along the aisle there was not full darkness, but a dusky thickening of detail and outline, the overhead racks obscured and the reclining chairs down now under a burden of huddled and awkward bodies. In their corner it seemed quiet and secluded, just a few stars outside, and that tranquil flood of coldly unshadowed moonlight.

"What will happen to Papa?" she asked quietly. "You know, don't you?"

He hesitated, aware of the grey eyes studying him.

"That's pretty difficult to say," he admitted uncomfortably.

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" A man like your father—well, he was in public life for a long time, and I understand from Inspector Mulready that he might have some pretty important information for us—if he feels like giving it. But that's the trouble. He's retired now. So—"

" Of course," she said, her lips curving scornfully. " You think he's got out of it that way. Oh yes—don't bother to deny it. I know what you and Inspector Mulready feel about him. It's quite plain. He's just coming home now because the investigation is all done and forgotten. That explains everything, doesn't it? "

He flushed slightly.

" I'm sorry," she said. " I shouldn't have said that; you've been very kind. But if you knew Papa the way I do . . . It's a question of different loyalties, I suppose. Or maybe it's simpler than that. Maybe he just feels a decent human prejudice against informing—giving information about anyone. Not himself so much, but old friends, people he's known for so long that—" She smiled painfully. " I seem to be getting all twisted up, don't I? But he's old now, and ill, and he feels that everyone has deserted him. Well, that's all right too. He doesn't need those people, not any more. He'll always have me. He's got that much, anyway."

He moistened his lips carefully. What did that mean? Was it a declaration between them—perhaps a warning?

" Yes," he said. " Different loyalties; I'm glad you see it that way. Because I'd like to think that we could still be friends afterwards, no matter what happens. That if I wanted to see you again—"

She drew off a little, the grey eyes wavering from him.

" Why? " she said. " I mean, seeing me. There'd be no point, I'm afraid. Because if anyone hurt Papa, I could never forgive them for that. Never."

There was a brief pause between them.

Then he said doggedly, " But that's just not sensible. Two people can have liking and respect for each other even when they're on different sides. Why not? "

" Oh yes," she said, tightening her hands over the blanket. " Liking and respect. But maybe, if you wanted to see me again, it wouldn't be only a question of liking and respect, would it? "

There seemed to be a desperate honesty in her at that moment, as if she would admit whatever he wanted her to admit—and yet show him it could change nothing between them. Her head lowered again, miserably. " And there's something else," she said, her voice faltering a little. " You don't know me at all. I'm not the kind of person you might think I am. I'm like Papa, I suppose. I can't show . . . certain emotions, perhaps can't even feel them. I never could."

He said quietly, " Maybe you've never given yourself the chance to find out. Some people are important to us, and others aren't. And when they're important, I don't believe that time matters so much. You know it right away. I knew it in Rome yesterday."

" Of course," she said, resting her head wearily against the seat.

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" I couldn't be that important to anyone—that exceptional. Well, I don't seem to be very good at this sort of thing; I suppose I never was, actually. So please . . . How high are we? Do you know? "

Up forward, on the other side of the plane from them, Jack Eiler had also curled up in his reclining seat, hat over his eyes, an airline blanket over his shoulders. He was not sleeping, however. Instead, with increasing uneasiness, he was waiting for Inspector Mulready to leave that end of the plane for a minute or so. What was he talking about, anyway? What was keeping him so long with that young man with the curly hair?

The conversation went on and on over there, whatever it dealt with; and at the same time, of course, up in the luggage rack, that flight bag must be ticking away noiselessly, second by second.

He drew in a long, shaky breath. Stupid, he told himself, to have boarded the plane with Inspector Mulready—stupid, stupid, stupid! And yet what choice had been offered to him? It was true that he could have remained safe in Ireland, but only in the hands of the Irish authorities. And then what would have happened to him after it became evident that he, and he alone, had tried to slip away from Flight 903 at the airport with such oddly providential foreknowledge of what was going to happen to it?

Perhaps the American police would never have legal proof of what he had done to John Desmond Fitzpatrick and to all these other people, but still, after they had looked up Jack Eiler's record, they would have a pretty good suspicion of it.

And suspicion was enough, with someone like Jack Eiler. They'd pin something on him, in some manner; they would have to, for their own self-respect.

He shifted himself round, peering out furtively under his hat brim at Inspector Mulready. No, he decided, he had done the right thing back at the airport, the only sensible thing. Because even now, at some moment before eleven o'clock, it should be possible to open the flight bag and to detach the timing mechanism; and, afterwards, when everyone was asleep, he could smuggle it back to the men's rest room under his overcoat and dispose of it there in some manner, perhaps as refuse.

And then what would the American police have on him, despite Inspector Mulready? Nothing at all but a phoney passport. Which was something very different, and very minor, too, compared to the mechanism in the flight bag.

Funny, though. He had never considered himself a nervous or emotional man, and yet it was very queer to lie quiet like this, doing nothing at all, and to think of the flight bag ticking away over him, ticking and ticking. Perspiration came out on his upper lip. He turned back again to the window, and risked another covert glance at his wristwatch. What time now? Good lord, ten-thirty-seven!

He began sweating in earnest then. But at just that moment, as if on cue, Mulready got up placidly, bent over for another word

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or two, and went off; and then the one with the curly hair got up also, and followed Mulready back.

Eiler had not even been conscious that he was holding his breath, but now he let it out in one rush. But careful, he warned himself; slow and careful. How to work the thing?

He emptied half a packet of cigarettes on the seat beside him, keeping that action under his blanket, and well out of Mulready's vision. Then he sat up, yawned, poked two fingers into the empty paper package, and dropped it in the aisle. They would notice that, wherever they were. A fellow could run out of cigarettes, couldn't he? And then, in the most natural way, a fellow could get down his flight bag and feel around in it as though searching for a fresh packet.

Why should they be suspicious of such an action? No reason. No reason at all.

And suddenly it was so simple, so well thought out, that a venomous exultation sprang up in him. This Mulready was so shrewd, wasn't he? Well, there were other people who could use their heads too. He grinned nervously, reaching both hands up over the luggage rack.

Just a little way in, he reminded himself; just over the seat. Farther back, though? Or a bit to the left? No. He shifted the blanket impatiently, and at first not quite believing the evidence of his own senses, he began to realize that there was something seriously wrong here. Something terrible!

There was nothing at all under that blanket now. The bag was gone.

Behind him, at the back, Mulready and his assistant were still murmuring together. Then old Fitzpatrick came out of the men's lounge, thumping along on his blackthorn stick, and Mulready detained him by putting a hand on his arm.

"There's one little matter," he said. "If you could give me a moment, sir—"

Fitzpatrick paused, Rose Margaret glancing round at him from her aisle seat; and Robert, lighting a cigarette, noticed that the man in the grey overcoat was behaving in an agitated manner.

First he sat down—collapsed, really—on the arm of his chair. Then he was perfectly motionless there, head down, arms hanging loosely. He rubbed his mouth, glanced up at the rack over him, and looked back at Mulready. He stood up: rubbed his mouth again; glanced at Mulready again.

Now he appeared to have reached some decision. He threw aside a coat hanging over the seat behind him, felt around under it, and moved back hurriedly to the next place. There he took down a flight bag from the luggage rack and yanked it open, but at once a stout woman with a foreign accent got up and pulled it away from him, squawking indignantly.

He made no protest—and no explanation, either. He turned quickly, looking from end to end of the luggage rack—and then,

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his face glistening like damp wax, he swung around to Mulready.

He stopped about five feet away, snarling silently, and came on again, but step by step this time, as if under compulsion. Then he pointed at Mulready, his arm shaking. Twice he opened his mouth, and twice nothing sensible or even audible came out of it.

"All right!" he managed to croak finally, his small eyes ugly and bright with hate. "You aren't taking anybody in, mister! You're not that clever! I'm not admitting anything to you—not a thing!"

They made a small private group all by themselves, the four men standing together near the plane door, with Robert and the girl seated exactly opposite. Mulready blinked.

"I'd advise you to go back to your seat," he remarked casually, "and to stay there. Mind now. This isn't the time or the place for any shenanigans, and the conversation is private. Eddie, get him away, will you?"

The stocky young man put a hand on Jack Eiler, and Eiler moved off two steps with him. Now he looked dazed. He tore himself free suddenly, yanking at one side of his shirt collar.

"Sure," he whispered at Martin Mulready, the arm up again, still accusing—and still shaking. "Play it like that. You've got it worked out, haven't you? You know all the answers! So now I have to get down on my knees to you! Is that it? Like hell! Because if that's what you're waiting for—"

"I'd moderate the tone and the words," Mulready said, his voice sharpening. "What are you talking about? What are you trying to tell me, anyhow?"

"Tell you?" Eiler moved within three inches of Mulready, glaring at him, face against face. A trap, he was insisting to himself. They had found the bag and hidden it, and now they reckoned that he would be forced to betray himself by asking for it. Of course. And yet—his head hummed crazily—suppose it wasn't a trap? There must be fifteen or twenty bags like that on Flight 903. Suppose someone had taken his by mistake? And suppose now, at this instant . . .

He began to hear something more than the engine noise—the pumping of his own heart. His eyes darted round, but behind him was only the plane aisle, and outside nothing more than a beautiful slim moon, with white clouds extending away tranquilly below. And under those clouds?

He pictured, horribly, a bright yellow flare in here at any instant, the plane smashing and tiny figures emptying out from it—doll-like, arms and legs whirling. Now even the floor felt paper-thin under him—no protection. He gave a low, anguished cry, like a tormented animal; then, raising both arms, he rammed straight ahead into Martin Mulready.

There was a brief struggle, but then Mulready and Eddie had him in hand. He panted, still trying to wrench free, and still whispering at them with a furious intensity as Mulready swung him off his feet and thrust him behind the lounge curtain. The flap

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of green cloth broke and then straightened after them, and everything became queerly muffled and ominous behind it—lurching movements in there, a blow, a heavy jar into one wall, somebody moaning aloud, and then crying out thickly and hysterically.

Robert got up hurriedly. "What is it?" he said. "What's the matter?"

Fitzpatrick's old face turned back to him, uneasy and perplexed. "I don't know," he said. "Listen."

They listened; Rose Margaret stood up, too, very pale; and then Mulready appeared again from behind the curtain.

"What's the commotion?" Fitzpatrick demanded, raising his blackthorn stick. "What's going on, sir?"

"The commotion?" Mulready said. He came two steps forward, everyone on Flight 903 in front of him, unaware as yet of what was going on behind that door. "The commotion, sir, is that we seem to have a little remembrance aboard from some devoted old friends of yours; and that we'd better locate it before eleven o'clock, when it's timed to go off in here. A bit of a thing in a flight bag—just so big. There's your answer, sir—and you can thank for it the people you were vowed and determined to protect with your last breath!"

He started off down the aisle with Eddie, then turned back again with that same quiet vehemence.

"And now," he declared breathlessly, "you'll protect them all right, so don't worry about it. But you'll not protect either yourself or the girl there, or the innocent women and children that have the misfortune to be aboard with you. Because that's all out of your hands now, sir—and in mine."

Fitzpatrick had backed off a little, gaping at him, half lifting the blackthorn stick and then dropping it helplessly. His face changed colour little by little until it had the greyness and mottled texture of cheap scrap paper.

It seemed to Robert that he himself had felt nothing at all at Mulready's revelation—or nothing sensible. Rose Margaret had drawn back against him instinctively, and he had put his arm round her.

"It's all right," he said, feeling oddly surprised that he could speak at this moment in such a normal manner. "They'll find it, of course—now that they know about it. There's still time."

But he felt exactly what Jack Eiler had felt a few moments ago—all that empty space out there, the North Atlantic twenty thousand feet down.

"Rose!" old Fitzpatrick breathed at her. "Child!"

Then he saw Eiler glaring out at them from behind the curtain. He whirled around, lifting the blackthorn stick, and struck out. His lank hair disordered, Eiler crouched down against the water cooler, shuddering, rolling his head, and making no attempt to defend himself.

Help them search, Robert thought suddenly. Don't just stand around like this. Because now—

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He was a little too late, however. Flight 903 glided forward in a long sweep, steadied, and levelled off—and ahead of them, in the plane aisle, Inspector Mulready swung around, balancing himself carefully and holding a quite ordinary-looking flight bag.

Then his first sensible thought came to Robert. He ran back into the lounge. Water, he thought; soak it. He had the sink full when Inspector Mulready plunged it in, and just in time too—it was then, by his watch, exactly three and a half minutes before eleven o'clock.

The hostess came round about three in the morning with breakfast trays—bacon and eggs, hot rolls, and good, strong coffee. Inspector Mulready did full justice to that menu, and so did the young fellow with the curly hair. But across from them, with hands manacled together now under his blanket, Jack Eiler obstinately refused to eat.

"Not that I blame him," Eddie murmured, mopping up his last bit of egg yolk. "He was the one that had it all worked out, of course—only he just hadn't the nerve to go through with it. You know what I put into that bag back in Ireland, Inspector, after I had found the other thing? A couple of magazines and an empty cigar box."

"But of course, it wasn't the object itself," Mulready said, settling back comfortably. "It was just the idea of it. We had two problems, remember—one to link up the fellow over there with the kind of bag that might have belonged to anyone on this plane, if he denied knowing about it—and he would have—and the other to put the right kind of pressure on Johnny Fitzpatrick."

He considered a moment. "Because," he added meditatively, "that old fellow is never going to show you what he feels for that daughter of his. After tonight, I think, you'll find few people so bitter about old friends as John Desmond Fitzpatrick—and none so merciless. We gave all the passengers a bit of a scare, I suppose, but then, how could we help it?"

"I'll grant you one thing," Eddie said, grinning at him. "I knew what was in that bag—I'd put it there, after you told me—and yet you had me sweating blood along with the rest of them."

"Ah, I did," Martin Mulready said. He finished his second cup of coffee, looking cosily satisfied with himself. "Well, you get older and wiser, and you pick up a few tricks of the trade here and there. And then I had to make a strong enough impression on Lord Johnny and the other fellow—smash them right over the head with it. The one thing that worried me was that we might get everybody else into a blind panic; that's why I tried to time it so close, and to keep it all to ourselves back there. When I saw Fitzpatrick go up with the stick, of course, I knew I had him. So . . . But not a word of all this to Kelliher, you understand, now or later; he'd never forgive me for frightening the girl like that. Never! Are they still sitting over there together, the two of them—and discussing affinities?"

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He risked a covert glance over the old-fashioned square spectacles. It satisfied him. No, he told himself; there'd be no bone of contention now between those two. The information he'd get tomorrow from Lord Johnny Fitzpatrick would be free and voluntary information—oh, depend on it—and after that part was over young Kelliher would have nothing but a clear road and a hearty welcome in front of him. He tapped Eddie twice on the knee.

"That's it," he said. "I know it, and mark my words."

A cigar? he thought then. He permitted himself three cigars a day—a fourth sometimes, but only on exceptional or else festive occasions. He meditated again then, with an air of the most sober judiciousness, reached into his vest pocket, and got out one of his special Havanas. It was all right, he told himself, because on the whole, and after considering the matter from every angle, it did seem to Inspector Martin Mulready that he rather deserved it.

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TOGA VIRILIS

In the hush, the clang of a metal door
—the moment was come

BY NEIL BELL

IT was late evening in Rome in the year B.C. 141. The day had been hot, oppressive, sweltering, and now in the distance the slow rumble of thunder promised a storm and welcome rain and coolness.

In the streets huge crowds, glowing with wine and love-making, still danced riotously, with much laughter and shouting and whistling and the screaming of girls flying before too ardent pursuit. Every now and again, in a lull of the joyous festivities, and rising above the incessant low rumble of distant thunder, came the roar of the wild beasts in their cages under the arena of the Circus Maximus.

Lying awake in his bed was a boy of fourteen. He was Marius, the only child of the Senator Pomponius and of Sabina, still considered by many the most beautiful woman in Rome. Pomponius was one of the wealthiest men in Rome and an intimate friend of the Consul. The tongue of scandal said that his marriage was a stormy one and that his wife, twenty-five years his junior, and whom he had married when she was fifteen, had known other beds than his.

He knew of these tales, as he was meant to know, but he ignored them. He refused to spy, to pry. He tried to thrust suspicion out of his mind. Yet, an ageing man of sixty-five, looking and feeling his years, passionately in love with his wife, he could not always succeed.

At times, jealousy gnawed him, and with it came the desolating thought that Sabina did not love him, had never loved him, and had married him for his wealth and position. At these times, the image of her in another man's arms, caressed and caressing, drove everything else from his mind and left it filled with hatred and the lust to wound, to torture, to kill.

But in calmer moods he saw things more reasonably. Why should Sabina have married him for his money or his position? Her father, Petronius, was a patrician, a rich and influential man, and her brother, Quintius, had already at twenty-two won

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honours in Gaul as an officer of the famous Twelfth Legion. No, she had married him because she loved him. And she still loved him. He was sure of that. If he were not sure—but he *was* sure. The gulf of twenty-five years was a long time, regarded in many ways, but looked at through the eyes of love it was nothing, a finger span, the beat of a bird's wing . . .

It was not the joyous noises from the streets outside which were keeping young Marius awake, nor the remote thunder, nor the roaring of the animals. He did not even consciously hear them, being engrossed with his thoughts of the morrow. That day would be a milestone in his life, perhaps the most important of all, and one he would remember always. He would be fifteen tomorrow, and soon after getting up, and before eating, he would attend the ceremony of investment with his robe of a man, the white Toga Virilis.

Again and again, as he turned restlessly on his pillow, unable to find a cool place in his bed, his glance went to the chair where, carefully folded by his Nubian slave, lay his Toga Prætexta, the garment of boyhood, with its broad purple border. This he would put on in the morning, and then, at the ceremony, discard for ever, no longer a boy but a man—and if a beardless one, well, that too would soon be righted. And his fingers went to his upper lip where little beads of sweat had gathered on the down now beginning to grow there quite strongly.

His thoughts continued their anticipatory enjoyment of the coming day. After the robing ceremony there would be the feast; and then, in the afternoon, the visit to the Circus Maximus where chief among the many exciting gladiatorial shows would be a fight between a wild, recently captured lion, and Varius, the greatest gladiator of the time, now past his fortieth year and never once defeated during more than twenty years of public combats.

And sitting beside Marius would be the thirteen-year-old daughter of Quintius, his cousin, Julia, to whose loveliness many poets had already written songs, and not only young poets, but the ageing and celebrated Terence.

Marius was in love with Julia. His thoughts rested for a long while on her and, behind his closed eyes, her image was so vivid that she seemed to be in the room with him.

He wondered why his mother disliked her, saying she was cruel and faithless and given to lying, and that she tortured her domestic pets. To Marius, as he lay there, his imagination warm and intoxicating with his thoughts of her, those charges seemed unfair and even grotesque. Did not everyone torture animals and birds? It was part of the fun of life, the lure of which brought the crowds thronging into the circuses. How silly of his mother to talk like

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that. And did not everyone tell lies when it suited them? And wasn't everybody cruel at times? It was all a part of life.

And Julia could be kind too and gentle and loving. What did his mother mean by faithless? It meant nothing, was just a way of speaking, and said only because she did not like Julia. Why didn't she? Was it because the poets who had written many songs to Sabina were now writing them to Julia? He thought it must be so, yet hated the thought that his mother could stoop to envy and jealousy.

At the circus the next afternoon Marius, proudly wearing his Toga Virilis, had a front seat just behind the barrier of the arena, facing the lofty throne where presently, to a fanfare of silver trumpets, the Consul would enter while the packed crowd rose to acclaim him. The Consul rarely now attended a circus and it was only on a great occasion, such as the appearance of so famous a gladiator as Varius, that he honoured the show and delighted the populace with his presence.

Beside Marius sat Julia, a filmy silk scarf over the shoulders of her blue silk robe. She wore a chaplet of roses in her hair, jewelled earrings, and a heavy gold bracelet above the elbow of each arm. Her lips were painted. As she moved in her seat, fluttering her scarf or her robe, the fragrance of her favourite perfume drifted to him slowly on the hot still air.

A gold box of little comfits sweetened with honey was in her lap and they both helped themselves and munched steadily, waiting eagerly for the opening fanfare. Suddenly it burst out, shrill and silvern, and was repeated six times. The Consul strode in, stood a moment bowing to the cheering crowd, and then, seated himself, smiled, and raised his hand as a signal for the performance to begin.

The great Varius, the star performer, would not appear until the end. For two hours Marius and Julia sat enthralled by the bloody combats in the arena, separated from their seat only by a strong barricade. Men fought against men with a strange variety of weapons, men fought with animals, beast fought beast. There were many kills. Now and again a victor, his beaten and maimed adversary at his feet, looked up at the Consul for the signal that meant life or death to the conquered.

Sometimes the crowd cheered the Consul's decision; at other times they roared and bellowed disapproval. But either way, the Consul only smiled. He liked the populace to show their true feelings, and publicly encouraged them to do so, and this was one of the reasons for his tremendous popularity.

Sometimes Julia and Marius held hands. Sometimes they whispered together, their heads very close. Now and again she

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teased him for his so obvious pride in his toga of manhood. He had never before been so happy, had never, when he had often looked forward to this great day, dreamt that it could possibly hold such rapture.

And now, with the death of a young bull that had fought gallantly against a dozen dogs, a sudden silence fell over the great crowd. Then isolated voices began to cry, "Varius! Varius!" Presently thousands of voices took up the cry as the famous gladiator sauntered into the arena, bowed once to the Consul, then four times to the people at the four corners of the compass, and finally clapped his hands. The moment had come.

There was the sound of shot bolts and the clang of a metal door. A huge lion loped into the arena, stood still, raised its great maned head, and roared at the sea of faces as if in challenge or defiance.

Fifty paces from the lion, and as yet unnoticed, Varius stood, his arms folded. Slung over his right shoulder was the quiver holding the twelve short javelins with which he would play the lion. At his left hip was the hunting-knife with which he would deliver the final stroke to the heart.

To Marius he seemed like one of the gods, as if standing there in proud majesty contemplating the mass of human faces with aloof amusement.

"Isn't he magnificent?" Julia whispered. "Don't you wish you were such a man?"

"I am a man," Marius said quietly, "and one day perhaps I may be as great as Varius."

"Oh, *one* day!" Julia said. And then, "You can be great today."

"Can I?" Marius said, only half listening, his glance going from the proud figure of the gladiator to the lion, now slowly moving towards him, not fifty yards from where they sat.

"You can if you dare," Julia said. "Fetch this," and she tossed her silk scarf into the arena.

Marius stared into her eyes a moment in startled wonder. His face whitened. And then without a word he vaulted the barricade and ran towards the dropped scarf.

It was but a matter of seconds, so quickly done that the hushed and watching thousands hardly saw what happened. The lion sprang for Marius, and Varius leapt between them, grasped the boy round the body, and flung him over the barricade into safety, even as the huge beast landed on the gladiator's back, snarling, biting, and ripping.

In the few remaining seconds before it was all over, that vast multitude saw something never before witnessed in Rome: a life-and-death struggle at close quarters between an unwounded lion

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and a man already mortally hurt. And the dying man won. Summoning in one supreme effort his fast-ebbing strength, he plunged home the hunting-knife. The lion rolled over on its side and Varius fell across its dead body.

They thought him dead, but a spark of life still glowed and flickered and refused to be quenched.

They carried him into a room below the throne and the Consul came to praise him.

He opened his eyes and smiled faintly and thanked the Consul, and then he said, " Bring me Marius."

And when Marius came, Varius said to the surgeons and attendants and to the curious who had crowded into the room, " I would speak to him alone. Leave me."

When all were gone, Marius covered his face with his hands, fearing he would be seen crying. And then he braced himself and kneeling down by the couch said, " Can you ever forgive me? "

Varius smiled.

" Ever will not be long. But there is nothing to forgive," he said. " I am proud of you. And glad it was my hand that saved you. Do you know why? "

Unable to speak, Marius shook his head.

" You are my son. Raise me up. The blood is choking me. I will tell you—"

The words were cut short, his hands fluttered out for a moment towards Marius, and he was dead.

That evening Marius was sent for to his mother's apartments and she asked him what had passed between him and the dying gladiator.

" He told me I was his son," Marius said. " Is that true? "

" Yes."

" I was adopted? Then who was my mother? "

" I am your mother. Varius and I met and loved one another when I was twelve and he only two years a man. But he was a plebeian. We kept our secret and I was married to Pomponius. I continued to meet Varius in secret. You were born two years after my marriage and Pomponius believes he is your father. What are you going to do? "

" It was for Varius my father to say what should be done, and he is dead and the book closed. I am proud to be his son." His voice broke. " He said—he said—" his control went from him and for a moment he was shaken with weeping; then he went on, his voice strong and steady—" he said he was glad it was his hand that had saved me."

History relates a strange sequel to this story. Marius married

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Julia. The marriage was childless and after fifteen years they adopted the young son of Lucius, a gladiator. Lucius was the son in wedlock of the great Varius. The adopted boy was given the name Marius. Marius the elder was seven times Consul of Rome, Marius the younger three times.

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★ ★ ★

IMPERIAL—

Another exclusive interview—appropriately surrealist this time—was with Salvador Dali . . . At least two things remained in everyone's memory—the enormous antennae of Dali's moustaches. Indeed, Muggeridge had begun the whole conversation by saying, " I know we're supposed to discuss modern art, and I expect we shall, but first of all may I say I'm fascinated by your moustaches. Might I ask—*what happens to them at night?* "

Salvador Dali clutched his jewelled stick and rolled his melancholy dark eyes towards the roof.

" They droop," he replied.

Then he told us how they'd first stood on end when he'd been eating fat bacon and had wiped his fingers on them. And after the rambling, pointless, but somehow fascinating interview was over, and the studio lights had faded, Dali beckoned to the pretty make-up girl in her pale blue B.B.C. overall. She had hitherto been refused permission to apply anything to the surrealist painter's face.

" Now," said Dali. The moustaches had begun to droop. So Salvador Dali became the first television personality in my experience to be made up *after* his interview instead of before.

MICHAEL BARSLEY, *Behind the Screen*

—PREFERENCE

Lady Nelly left her husband,
And would with his lordship be,
She would trim his lordship's whiskers
As she sat upon his knee.
Some said oh, lack-a-daisy,
She was in a comical way!
His lordship was bald-pated,
And his hair and whiskers grey.

Ballad of the Naughty Lord & the Gay Young Lady, Damages, £10,000

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GAMBLER'S LUCK

Not one man in a million has it

BY ARTHUR GORDON

HO, there, bartender—turn up the gas a bit! Ah, that's better. Now, then, monsieur, be so good as to select a card. Any card at all. Don't look at it; just put it on the bar there, face down. That's right.

Now fix your eyes on the back of that card, monsieur. Concentrate with all your might. You find, do you not, that the names of several cards occur to you? But one a little more strongly than the rest? Speak it aloud, monsieur; do not hesitate. The Queen of Hearts? Very good. Very good indeed!

Now observe closely. I do not touch the card on the bar. I merely place the rest of the pack on top of it—so. Now *you* lift the whole pack, monsieur, and look at the bottom card . . . Ah, there she is—her Royal Highness of Hearts!

A conjurer's trick, you say? Well, monsieur, you are entitled to your opinion. I can see that you have no conception of the power of your own mind. And you have a remarkable mind. Very remarkable indeed. Had I one tenth of your gift, monsieur, you would not find me cadging drinks down here on the waterfront. Ah, no, I should be up at the Casino this very minute, and by morning I should be known far and wide as the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

In any case, I drink your health, monsieur. Your health, and a thousand healths to the man who first distilled absinth. One of humanity's great benefactors, eh? He should be canonized!

The gift I spoke of? Ah, monsieur, if you have lived in ignorance of it for so long, perhaps it would be wiser to talk of simpler things. You are from Paris, are you not? Your accent, the cut of your evening clothes—unmistakable! And I can guess, too, why you came down here: to watch our Lisette dance.

They talk of her up at the Casino, do they not? And with good reason. When she dances, she awakens something in you, monsieur, something that lives deep inside, close to the edge of darkness. Even I feel it, crippled as I am. Ah, yes, ridiculous though it seems, there are times when I pretend that Lisette is dancing just for me . . .

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The gift I mentioned? You still wish to know about that? Well, monsieur, if you insist, why don't we take our drinks to that alcove? It is quieter, and if the cabaret should begin, you could still see Lisette dance. Just follow me. Sit there, monsieur.

Now, the gift I spoke of is very rare. Not one man in a million has it, and often this man is just as unaware of it as you are, monsieur. But in every generation a few men possess it. St. Paul spoke, did he not, of the gift of prophecy? And the great Napoleon had it in mind when he said, "Never mind your men with courage or brains, give me the man who is lucky."

For luck is not always a matter of chance, monsieur. Sometimes it can be controlled. It takes a special gift, such as you have, and a special knowledge of that gift, such as I have. But it can be controlled.

Perhaps I knew that card on the bar was the Queen of Hearts. I don't deny this. Cards are my servants, I can make them do what I choose. But you did not know it, monsieur, and assuredly I did not tell you. You divined it, monsieur, you knew it because you have the gift of clairvoyance, the gift of prophecy.

Now suppose I could show you how to make use of that gift whenever you needed it? It would be helpful up at the Casino, would it not? If you knew simply whether to play red or black at roulette, and if you were right only nine times out of ten, still you would go back to Paris a rich man, would you not? A very rich man, monsieur. Rich enough to reward me properly, too.

It would not be hard for me so to condition your mind. Shall I try? It would require no effort on your part. Just co-operation for a minute or two. Of course, if you would rather not . . . Very well, monsieur. As you say, what is there to lose?

You see the gas jet here above my head? Fix your eyes on the flame, monsieur. Fix your eyes and keep them there. Let your body recline against the wall. Make yourself comfortable, very comfortable. Let yourself relax. Listen to my voice and forget about everything else. Do not try to think. Listen to my voice. Watch the yellow flame. See how calm it burns, how steady, how bright. A soothing sight, is it not, monsieur? It makes one sleepy just to watch it. Let your head fall back, monsieur. You are feeling sleepy too. Your eyelids are getting heavy. Listen to my voice. Sleep will come to you soon. Watch the yellow light. You are floating, now, floating far away. All is calm, all is quiet. Far, far away. You can hear my voice. Nothing but my voice. Now your eyes are closing, monsieur. Now you are going to sleep. Deep, deep into sleep. Gently into sleep. Now your eyes are closed, but you can still hear my voice. You can hear, and you will obey . . .

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Put your left hand on the table, monsieur, the one with the diamond ring. That's right. Now we shall test the depth of your slumber. I shall touch your hand with the tip of my cigarette. But you will feel no pain. No pain at all. There! You see? You do not flinch because you do not feel. I suggest to you that there is no pain, and there is none.

Now I have other things to suggest to you. Listen carefully. When I snap my fingers, you will awaken. You will open your eyes, but you will remember nothing of this. And when I snuff out my cigarette, you will suggest that we go for a walk. A walk along the waterfront, monsieur. Just the two of us. The streets are dark and empty, but you will not be afraid. We shall walk out on the breakwater, you and I. Out on the breakwater, understand? At the end, where the tide runs deep, you will give me your wallet, your watch, and your ring. You will hand them to me for safe keeping, since I am your friend. Then you will turn your back, and we shall see what we shall see.

I regret that you will not see Lisette dance, monsieur. But it would have done you little good, because she belongs to me. Ah, yes, I am nothing but a poor twisted creature, but Lisette belongs to me. She is expensive, but I can afford her—thanks to the gullibility of people like you. Of stupid, greedy, lascivious fools like you! You and your Queen of Hearts! You could have called for any card in the deck and it would have been there, waiting for you . . .

Now I will snap my fingers. So! Ah, monsieur, I believe you dozed off there for a moment. But never mind. It is almost time for the cabaret. Soon, now, you will have the pleasure of watching Lisette dance. Soon, now . . .

Monsieur? Why are you standing up? Wait a moment—What is this? I have done nothing! No! No handcuffs! You can prove nothing!

Let me go! Let me go! *Let me go!*

SOLUTIONS to WHAT'S WHAT? on page 51

1. *One shilling; a creditor can refuse a larger sum in pennies.*
2. *The Chancellor of the Exchequer.* 3. *Ten.*
4. *George Bernard Shaw.* 5. *Spoonerism.*
6. *a. Harry Lauder; b. Irving Berlin; c. Charles Dickens.*
7. *Hansom, a Birmingham architect, invented Hansom cabs; French hackney coaches took their name from their stopping-place, the Hotel de St. Fiacre, named after a saint of Irish descent who founded a monastery near Paris.*
8. *Think again!*

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Birds in their little nests agree

" *Writing here last autumn of my hopes of seeing a hoopoe . . .*"
SIR STEPHEN TALLENTS *in The Times*

I, too, once hoped to have a hoopoe
Wing its way within my scoopoe,
Crested, quick, and heliotroopoe,
Proud Upupa epops.
For what seemed an eternity,
I sat upon a grassy sloopoe,
Gazing through a telescoopoe,
Weaving snares of finest roopoe,
Fit for Upupa epops.
At last, one day, there came to me,
Inside a crusty enveloopoe,
This note: " Abandon hope, you doopoe;
The hoopoe is a misanthroopoe.
(*Signed*) *Your far-off friend, U.e.*"

JOHN UPDIKE, *Pooem*

Exotic

This Conservatory was filled with exotic birds flying at large amongst the creepers and flowering trees: red-tailed *Cordons-bleus*, Indigo Birds splashed with green, Nutmeg and Zelva Finches, Wax-Bills of cinnamon with rosy beaks, Budgerigars like little green paroquets, deep crimson and scarlet, Cardinal Birds, Blue Robins of all shades from dark to light, Japanese Rice Birds, Pekin Nightingales, with the mellow russet tints of autumn leaves. These birds sang early and late throughout the year, the Zelva Finches making a gentle pleasant trumpeting sound, the song of the Blue Robin being something like that of a thrush, of the Cardinal Bird like a blackbird, of the Pekin Nightingale like the sweet singer whose name it bears . . . This bird when its

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young were hatched would take almost any food with honey in it, but strangely preferred it off a pink plate: a fact inexplicable, till it was discovered that in its native habitat the bird feeds from a pink flower. On one occasion, the Zelva Finches having deserted their nest, the eggs were hatched out, and the young birds fed by a Virginian Nightingale which was without a partner. The Whydah Birds are blue-black with silver breasts and a touch of orange at the throat and have long sheaf-shaped tails. They are attracted by music, and when there was dancing would sometimes fly in and out of the arches to the further end of the drawing-room, passing over the heads of the dancers.

SIR GEORGE SITWELL

Romantic

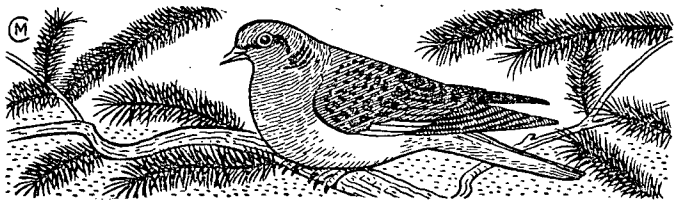
I'm just a little Turtle-Dove
Who dearly loves a little love,
A little fond affection on the side.

But though I love to bill and coo
With someone just like you—and you,
I couldn't count the tears that I have cried.

Of all the lessons I have learnt
This is the one most true:
It's Turtle-Doves who pay the bill
That comes with every coo.

So if you see a Turtle-He
Who's looking for a wife,
If he will always love me,
I'll lead him such a lovely,
Such a lovely,
Turtle-Dovely
Life.

KATIE CORAM



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Bird of Passage

The ways of the East were still with us, in spite of our motor transport. We stopped at café after café, to sip tea or greet some old acquaintance, called in at the judge's mango grove to taste the new crop, talked of the future of the Sudan.

At one stop, we were just getting out of the car when the judge pulled me urgently on to the ground beside him. As I crouched low, expecting an attempt on our lives at least, thundering feet passed in a cloud of dust. As the wildly running creature dwindled away into the distance, my companion laughed.

" The Governor's ostrich has escaped again."

" But doesn't anyone stop him? They can kill you, they are dangerous! "

" No, because he is the *Governor*'s ostrich. He will come back eventually. In any case, he is going towards Omdurman, which is a sanctified place. Who am I to stop him? " Even religionists can have a sense of humour in the Sudan . . .

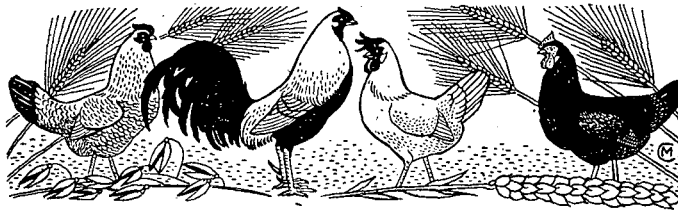
THE SAYED IDRIES SHAH, *Destination Mecca*

Fowl Play

It is not generally known
But cannot be contested,
That every species, strain or stock,
The White Leghorn, the Plymouth Rock,
The Wyandotte, the Fighting Cock,
Is wingless and unbreasted.

Please put my statement to the test,
I do not speak at random.
Dine in a train—North, South, East, West—
Order a slice of chicken breast,
You'll get a drumstick, nicely dressed,
Quod erat demonstrandum.

LEONARD COOPER



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COMING ATTRACTIONS!

in next month's ARGOSY

★ **H. E. BATES**

brilliant and intriguing story of a woman's beauty and its mysterious power

★ **BERKELY MATHER**

an exciting sequel to Rim of the Wheel—dramatic, fast-paced, new adventure of Geth Straker

★ **GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD**

for his vivid new story in his most haunting vein, this versatile writer chooses one of the world's great themes

★ **GARNETT RADCLIFFE**

spins an alluring new comedy round an ambitious clock-maker and some forbidden houris

★ **MICHAEL GILBERT**

another exciting Petrella mystery

For the Best of today's Reading

and the Best in today's Writing

ARGOSY

the Short Story Magazine

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RIM OF THE WHEEL

By Berkely Mather

I ONLY know one more beautiful view than this and that is across the St. Lawrence below Quebec, in September, but if I think of it, Perry will start to bedevil me again because that is where she came from and it was September when I met her. We'll stick to this view—the view that I was looking at.

The northern horn of the bay jutted straight out into the Gulf of Aden, due west, then it curved gently to the south and sank beneath the surface, failing to meet the southern bluff by a quarter of a mile. It was in this gap that the sun went down in a fiery glow of crimson and orange, which made a path from the horizon to the beach under my window.

I used to make an effort each evening at sundown and climb up on the high window sill to look out, because I'm a poetical sort of fellow underneath it all. It sure was pretty. The dhows at anchor down below—the little white fort on the southern bluff that used to turn golden about this time—the clump of six palms just where the rocks dropped to the dazzling beach, and the slender minaret that rose beside them.

Two things spoilt it: the twenty-pound cuff and chain on my left ankle, and the Sultan's nephew. The cuff because it had started to chafe the flesh from my shinbone, and His Serene Highness Ali ben Yussuf ben Fazal ben Safaraz's brother's son because he made mewing noises for fifteen seconds, stopped them for twenty, and then made them again for another fifteen. He did this for twelve hours a day. For the other twelve he moaned weakly in the cell next to mine. Not that you could blame the guy. He had a lot to try him—but it was wearing.

They used to stretch him along the rim of a twelve-foot wheel,

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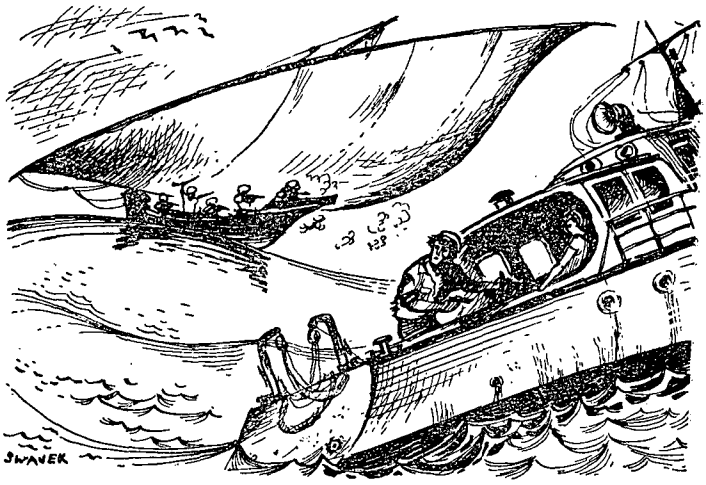

face up, chained by the ankles and wrists. The wheel was in the vertical plane and it had buckets at the end of each spoke that used to scoop the water from the shallow well in the courtyard at the bottom of their travel and dump it with a pleasant splashing sound into an overhead gutterway at the top, from where it ran down to keep the Sultan's pretty little garden cool and green. It was turned by a blindfold camel that walked in a stately circle, harnessed to the end of a palm-wood shaft.

The camel was kept on the move by a little Arab boy with gazelle eyes and the expression of a Michelangelo cherub. He loved his camel. He used to feed it dates and sing to it when he wasn't doing unnameable things to the Sultan's nephew with his sharp driving-stick. To amuse his little friends he would sometimes reverse the camel's march so that the nephew went into the well head first instead of feet first. He used to be beaten for that if he was caught by the gardener because upside-down buckets scoop no water.

The *Peregrine* was still where they'd anchored her when we had come in days ago, but I could only see her at ebb tide when she swung round to the full ride of her cable. The rest of the time she was hidden by the cliff that fell away to the beach beneath the courtyard wall. They'd taken the cargo out of her. I could tell that by the freeboard she was showing. Once or twice I had heard a protesting roar from one or other of her powerful twin diesels as some mutton-fisted true believer tried to start her up, and those were the only occasions on which I grinned, or near-grinned, in six weeks: our Maude and Alice had a way with them—a way known only to Casey and me. And Casey was dead . . .

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It was Casey who started it all. He brought the Greek down in the first place.

The thermometer had stuck at one hundred and fifteen for days, with maybe a ten-degree drop at nights. We were moored at the smelly end of the oil wharves at Sondah, because harbour dues are cheapest there and the chips were low. We should have been better off at anchor but that is forbidden in the oil ports. We shouldn't have been there at all had it not been for a sprung layshaft in the starboard reduction-gear.

Casey had gone up that morning to have a last crack at Malekafian, the Armenian dockyard manager, for a month's credit on the repairs. I'd had a thousand-buck advance on the four thousand buck skin-diving pearl-shell contract I'd taken in Port Sudan but most of that had gone in stores, fuel, and dues in Naples. Time was running out and if I didn't check into Port Sudan in five days from now, ready to take the Arab divers aboard and clear for the pearling-grounds, I not only lost the contract but was liable for a writ of attachment on the *Peregrine* for the thousand advance. Those boys down there wouldn't trust their own fathers—even if they could trace them. I'd sent Casey because the sun and a touch of malaria had shortened my temper. Casey, as a paid hand, had less at stake than I, so the stark anxiety did not show so plainly. Anxiety in a client was points-on to Malekafian.

I had seen Casey coming along the wharf—long, lean, rangy, jeaned, sweat-shirted, bullet-headed, and slightly drunk—unless the fever had hit him, too. The guy with him was short and very fat. He had sweated in black patches through his pongee-silk suit and he was wiping his cropped skull with a bandanna and fanning himself with a Panama hat. The little man wheeled into the shade of the wharf shed before they reached me, but Casey kept straight on. I thought, and was right, that the Arab cop dozing against a crane ten yards farther on, had something to do with the detour.

Casey grinned his lazy grin. "What do they call them blokes who put up dough for busted theatre shows—when there's dames in 'em?" he asked.

"Angels," I told him. "But what the hell—? Did Malekafian play ball?"

"Nary a ball. Meet an angel." He cocked a black-nailed thumb over his shoulder towards the little fat guy.

I could see the *Peregrine* going down the creek with a writ nailed to her stumpy foremast, so I just swore weakly and dirtily. Casey grinned some more and looked wise.

"It's a fact," he said out of the corner of his mouth, because the cop had woken up and was strolling over casually. "Willing to put up the money to get the boat out of hock and pay for the repairs, plus another five grand when the job's done."

"What job?" I didn't believe him but it was too hot to think of anything more to call him.

"Let's get aboard." He took a fifty-piastre note from his jeans and held it out palm downwards. Cops, in those parts, will take

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no-look-see money as conjurers get chickens out of hats in Port Said. Gully-gully and it's gone.

The cop decided to chase a pi-dog from a fire hydrant on the other side of the wharf. The little man was out of the shade, across the gap, onto the *Peregrine*'s foredeck, and down the hatch even as I turned. I hadn't given Casey any money that morning. Now he was tight. Just a teeny bit tight—but knowing Casey's capacity, that had cost somebody more than somewhat. I followed him aboard.

The small cabin was hot. The little guy had been sweating like a June bride up in the comparative coolth of the wharf. Now he was Niag'ra-ing from every pore, which was only natural, and I could see that he was scared, badly scared. He looked as if he'd been dipped in the harbour, but even so I could see that his clothes were expensive. And the sweat-stench and the perfume he seemed to be wearing couldn't drown the smell of fear.

Casey said, "Mr. John Doe—spell it DOE or DOUGH, it's right both ways—Cap'n Geth Straker, skipper an' owner of this little scow—spell it any way you like."

Had I not been curious I'd have hit him for that. I didn't let even Casey call the *Peregrine* a scow. The little guy put out a hand. Have you ever held a small dead octopus? Don't.

"What would seem to be the trouble, Mr. Doe?" I asked.

"Trouble? No trouble. Only the small accommodation that I want." Greek, I decided; Athenian rather than Island Greek.

Casey moved to the locker. He knew that there was one bottle of Cyprus brandy left; it had been haunting him for days. I threw him the keys. Our guest looked as if he could do with some, even if Casey had had enough.

"Accommodation?" I asked. "You mean you want a passage somewhere?" He nodded vigorously and grabbed the enamel mug that Casey was holding out to him. His teeth rattled against the rim but it seemed to steady him. He put the mug down and took the seat I indicated on the locker top. I got the bottle back from Casey before he could pour his third shot.

"We're not equipped for passenger-carrying. We don't have a licence, and besides, I'm under charter . . ."

He brushed all this aside hastily. "Five thousand dollars and I fix debts, repairs—" He was reaching into his inside pocket now. "Five, six days' work."

"Where to?" I asked.

"Bab el Sondab."

"And where the Pete's that?"

"North of Mocha. I show when we get near there."

"Show me now—on the chart." I reached up into the overhead rack for the folio.

"No good," he told me. "Not marked."

"Then show me where it would be if it *was* marked." I unrolled the chart and pinned it down on the table with the bottle and the mugs. He stabbed with a stumpy forefinger into a blank

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white space on the Arabian coast. No soundings, no channels, no lights—not a thing.

"Nothing doing," I said. "I could rip the bottom out of her down there and the insurance people wouldn't pay a sou. I'm covered for charted waters or piloted entrances only." I started to roll up the sheets. I wasn't trying to stick him. I meant it. He grabbed my wrist. With his other hand he was holding his opened wallet. It was stuffed with paper—all the right colour. This fellow wanted a passage pretty badly.

"I get you good pilot—good passage. Do it in daylight." The brandy steadiness was passing off now and he was sweating again.

"Where would we pick him up?" I asked.

"From a dhow," he assured me. "I tell you—it all fixed."

"How the hell could it be fixed?" I demanded. "You blow in here from nowhere at all and hand it to me on a plate. What's the form, brother—the whole form?"

"Sharkey Bessim—he was going to do it. Then he go and make trouble with the gunboat . . ."

That rang a bell. Sharkey Bessim, a Turk from Smyrna, ran a boat something like the *Peregrine*; a fifty-foot twin-diesel job, just that much too big for economical running. So that was it. I was being offered a cargo that Sharkey had slipped up on. All right—all right as far as it went, except that Sharkey would take on *anything*. I, on the other hand, had my limits. I don't like drugs and I don't like the look in the eyes of people who are on the run because they don't have the right passport. I'd carry them free. I had done so often, but I wasn't making a business of it. One has to live with memories all one's life, and the memory of pleading eyes is the hardest to shake off.

"I gotta get another boat, mister!" His voice was hoarse and earnest. "I got plenty money—you see?"

He'd got that all right.

"How do you know I'm jannock?" I asked him. "You come aboard loaded with dough—how do you know I mightn't jump you down the Gulf and feed you to the sharks?"

"You Geth Straker," he told me. "You hard man, you hard Canada man, no? You do plenty tough thing, but you give word, you keep it. I know." That was his passport and his safe-conduct. He might have been as phoney as the Indian rope trick, but he had struck the weak spot in my ego. I gave word—I kept it.

"How do you pay?" I asked him.

"Half now—half when the dhow pick us up."

I sat back on the locker top, feet on the table, and thought hard for a while. What the heck had I got to lose? Casey was making another strategic advance on the bottle. I kicked his fingers away. It was going to be watch and watch down the Gulf from now on.

"It's a deal, brother," I told the Greek. "I don't know who you're running away from. It doesn't concern me—just so long as you remember who's skipper while you're aboard."

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He began counting from his roll. Two thousand five hundred. He stopped counting then and looked at me. In answer to my raised eyebrows he peeled off another thousand, and I heard Casey cooing softly behind me.

The sun was dipping over our starboard beam as we left Sondah harbour that evening. Malekafian, in answer to our hard cash, had certainly made those longshore chaps move fast. Casey was crouched over the twin diesels down below, crooning to them like a fond mamma. Five pounds in the right quarter had got us through the clearance formalities with a minimum of inspection, and Mr. Doe came out of the forepeak, where he'd been lying low behind the cable, as we chugged down the fairway at half throttle. The pongee suit had suffered further, and he badly needed a shave, but his fear seemed to have lifted.

He had not gone ashore since he joined us, but Casey had picked up his grip from the desert-bus terminal. The grip was a smallish one and seemed to hold only a supply of black Balkan cigarettes and a long string of garlic pods. I know of few dishes that half a clove of garlic doesn't improve, but this fellow chewed the stuff. He was chewing it now, in between puffs at one of his cigarettes. With the sweat and the perfume, it stank like an off-shore Suez breeze.

When a passenger is paying the sort of dough he was, he's entitled to reek of garlic if he wants to. He's entitled not to have to answer too many questions, either. But I was curious. I was also a little worried.

" Allowing for the fact that your finger covered an area of twenty square miles on the chart, I make it seven-fifty to where you want to go," I told him. " That'll be about midday Wednesday, but I've got to know a bit more than that." The cigarette point glowed and I saw the whites of his eyes roll towards me in the gathering darkness.

" What you want to know? " he asked.

" I want a definite point on the coast to make landfall. And I've got to know just where we meet the dhow."

" Ain Sukhna," he answered promptly. " Five miles off shore."

" That's not going to help much," I said. " I only know one Ain Sukhna. That's twenty miles south of here on the African side."

" That the place."

" But damn it! " I exploded. " You showed me a spot on the Arabian coast."

" What I show you then and where we going now, two different things, Captain. You keep going like so—maybe little more west—say course one-eight-five."

There's only one skipper in my wheelhouse at any given time. I slipped the clip over the wheel to hold her as she was going and turned towards him. The binnacle light reflected dully on the snub-nosed .38 he was holding. I turned back to the wheel.

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There was a vacuum at the pit of my belly but it was slowly filling with a cold, seething rage.

"Little more to west, Captain," he repeated. "Say two and a half degrees."

"This boat draws five feet unladen," I told him. "The water shoals rapidly to the west. We'll keep her as she is." On this course we should pass under the stern of the harbour guard boat. A flick of the wheel and a touch of reverse at the right minute and I could put her alongside the gangway without scratching anybody's paint—but Doe's.

The muzzle of the .38 touched my shirt just over my liver.

"Two and a half degrees starboard, Captain. I con her." His voice was flat and expressionless.

"You think you'll get away with it?" I asked.

"What I think—what you think—don't matter so long as you do like I say. That way nobody get hurt."

"Casey in this?" I asked between clenched teeth.

"Two and a half degrees starboard," he answered. "Put her over, Straker."

The riding-lights of the guard boat were dead ahead now. Three minutes at this speed and I'd be alongside.

"Look, Doe . . ." I began, playing for time.

The binnacle light exploded in a burst of orange fire that was followed by blackness and just nothing. That was it.

I came to in my bunk. My head felt as if a rock'n'roll band had been let loose inside it. I tried to rub my eyes to clear them but found I couldn't move my hands. Then, as I studied them dully, I saw that they were linked together with a pair of handcuffs. I even recognized the cuffs—a pair that Casey had brought aboard as a souvenir of a more than ordinary 'Donnybrook with the Bizerta police six months before. I worked my dry mouth to get a bit of salivation going among the fuzz, and then realized that my lips were closed tight with adhesive tape.

The engines were running at a steady three-quarter belt. In the dim light of the telltale compass in the deck-head above my eyes, I could see we were on a sou'-sou'-easterly course and that there was somebody at the wheel who didn't realize that the port engine needed to be throttled back a notch to balance her. He was pecking and yawing at the helm to keep her straight. That certainly wasn't Casey.

I tried to move my hands again—together this time—and then I saw that whoever had dumped me here had linked the cuffs over the bunk stanchion and that I was part of the fixtures.

The door opened and somebody came in behind me. I closed my eyes and played possum. The newcomer crossed to the bunk and I felt a hand on my brow. The hand didn't feel like a dead octopus. It didn't feel like a blacksmith's rasp either, so that ruled out both Doe and Casey. I risked one eye, and then closed it again. I was once more in the hot grip of malarial delirium. I usually

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see things that are the exclusive perquisite of a wealthy inebriate. But this was even nicer. It had coppery-red hair, and eyes the colour of the Mediterranean an hour after sunset, when the deep blue is being shot with greenish flecks. It had skin that was like English buttermilk that had somehow got itself slightly sun-kissed. It was about five feet three; thirty-four, twenty-six, and maybe thirty-three-and-a-half. It was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, and it had a slight smear of engine oil across its rather tip-tilted nose. It was very like Perry. In fact it *was* Perry, and it made me feel downright bad that a dose of quinine, if I could get it, was going to take her right off the boat that had been named after her. I opened both eyes to get a good look before she vanished.

She didn't vanish. She spoke. My fever-spooks never speak, so this came as a slight shock.

She didn't say, " Darling! What have they done to you? " She didn't look either sympathetic or indignant. She just grinned at me and said, " You *do* stick your neck out, don't you? "

Shock and the adhesive ruled out any answer to that. I realized she was solid now. I lay and goggled. She grabbed the end of the tape and flicked it off, together with a few square inches of whisker stubble. I found my voice.

" Couldn't that French gaol hold you? " I asked bitterly.

" The one that could hasn't been built."

" Bought your way out, eh? You had no cash—must have been in kind."

" They want you up on top," she said coldly, and dangled the handcuff key in front of me. " I'm going to loose you, but don't get ideas. You may be useful but you aren't indispensable."

" By the look of that compass they sure do need me. Who's steering? "

She didn't answer—just bent over me and unlocked the handcuffs. I got the scent of her hair again and I wished I was thirty years younger so I could cry like a child. Cry for things that might have been, cry for the Perry of ten years ago, and cry for the thing she was now—diamond-hard and phoney American. The pitiless, dull ache of disillusionment was never far away—never had been since the day she first came up before the Consular Court in Casablanca and I knew that Perry, my white dove, was a soiled pigeon. Very soiled.

I swung my legs over the edge of the bunk and dropped to the deck. Only then did I realize that Casey was in the bunk underneath. He was breathing quietly, too quietly. I bent over him and saw that blood stained the grimy pillow. Somebody had slugged him hard. At least that was a relief. The thought that Casey, too, had double-crossed me had been hurting. One two-timer on a boat the size of the *Peregrine* was enough.

She said, " I see you haven't changed her name."

" Re-registration costs thirty bucks," I told her, and let it go at that. She jerked her head in the direction of the door that led to the tiny saloon. I didn't duck soon enough and I caught my

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head on the top as I went through. A thin trickle of blood came down out of my hair from where the blackjack had caught me. My eyes went to the chronometer on the bulkhead. Three o'clock. We'd cleared the last buoy at Sondah at seven-thirty. I'd been out for seven hours or more.

There were three of them in the saloon. Doe, and a lean and hawklike Bedouin in full regalia, and another fat chap—almost as fat as Doe but taller. He might have been anything from Norwegian to light-coloured Turk; and when he spoke it didn't help any because his English was without accent of any kind. He had a round, flattish face with little twinkling grey eyes and the kindly if vacant expression of a ruminant cow.

He smiled gently at me.

"Feeling better, Captain?" he asked. His voice was round and thick and jolly. Fitted with a set of white whiskers and a red cloak he would have been a natural for Santa Claus.

I said, "I suppose you know that this is piracy?"

He roared until his chaps and belly shook, and slapped Doe on the back.

"I'm sorry, Captain," he said when he'd got his breath back, "but you looked so very precise as you said that. You might have been an Englishman. Of course, some Canadians are more formal than the home article. We're going to get on fine. Sit down—sit down."

Kind of him on my own ship, and had my knees only been doing their job properly, I'd have told him to go to hell. As it was, I sat. The *Peregrine* was bucking a short, steep sea that was coming from just abaft the starboard beam. The steering wasn't helping her any, even though she seemed to have taken on some cargo since I had been cooled off. She was certainly settled deeper in the water.

"Drink?" he invited, and pushed a bottle of Scotch and a mug towards me. I poured a Parsee peg—two fingers, index and little, with the two middle ones closed—and swallowed it neat. I said, "My mate looks in a bad way. If he dies, I'll see the lot of you strung up."

Again he went off into a bellow of laughter, translating it into perfect Arabic for the benefit of the Bedouin, who was chewing cardamon seeds from a small brass box. The Bedouin scowled, touching the two-foot length of curved steel wickedness at his waist, and regarded my neck with detached interest.

The big man shook his head disapprovingly and said to me, "Mr. Casey slipped and banged his head on the iron footplates. Berry attended to him"— that slurring "P" sound seemed to ring a bell somewhere—"she's been a nurse, you know."

I knew. She'd been a nurse's aide in the naval hospital in Quebec. That's where we'd met.

He went on, "Don't worry about the admirable Mr. Casey. We have more urgent things to talk about, Captain. Michelaides, I'm afraid, didn't tell you quite the truth in Sondah . . ."

"Michelaides?"

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He nodded towards Doe. " Mr. Doe, if you prefer it. Michelaides isn't his name either, but he answers to almost anything. We were going to charter you in Port Sudan . . ."

" I was already under charter." I swallowed the rest of the whisky.

He spread his hands and beamed. " That would have arranged itself. Your breakdown in Sondah rather threw our time-table out, so I sent Michelaides and El Pahlwan up to—er—negotiate with you. El Pahlwan, I'm afraid, stowed away without your knowledge while you were working on the dockside and Michelaides was enticing Mr. Casey into a bar to talk business. The rest you know. You were, in spite of Michelaides's entreaties, heading for the guard boat. Pahlwan—er—let you have it. They brought the boat to the rendezvous with the dhow and picked the rest of us up. Seven of us, Captain, and a few tons of cargo and stores—oh, and Berry. We mustn't forget the lovely B-Berry, must we? But of course, you're old acquaintances."

Perry passed through with a basin of hot water and lint, and that saved me from answering. That third " Berry " had placed him now. He was Sergei, the lawyer who had defended her in the Consular Court when she had gone down for drug-running four years ago. He had a beard then and heavy horn-rimmed glasses, and he spoke French. It was the same man, though.

" Well now, Captain. Our first meeting has not been in the most propitious circumstances but I know you're far too sensible to let that stand in the way of a profitable deal. Profitable to both of us. Same terms, Captain, and perhaps a little bonus of, say, another five thousand to ensure your goodwill and your discretion when we part." He beamed at me again.

" What's the job? " I asked.

" That's neither here nor there, but to save you futile speculation, I'll tell you." He was picking his words with care. " There's a small territory in the Persian Gulf, Captain. It is ruled by an old and anachronistic Arab gentleman in a style more suited to the early nineteenth century than our more enlightened days. The people groan, Captain—they groan. They would prefer a more up-to-the-minute ruler. Somebody like his nephew "— he bowed towards the Bedouin—" Ghazi, here. You are present at the making of history, Captain. We go to effect a coup d'état."

" Seven of you? "

" And, of course, others we shall meet at certain pre-arranged spots between here and our final destination."

" We're running guns for a private war, in other words? "

He looked slightly pained. " You oversimplify, Captain, but let it go at that. There will be no personal danger to yourself, or indeed to any of us."

" How do you come into it? " I asked.

" That, Captain, again is neither here nor there, but since you are bound to know sooner or later "—he looked almost coy—" a little matter of negotiation—of concessions."

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It clicked into focus then. Kimreh el Bawwabh. The old Arab ruler blowing hot and cold alternately to East and West—his hinterland soaked with oil that came almost to the surface.

" The question is," he said, " do you co-operate, and live to sail the seas for many a year to come, or do you—er—not co-operate, and go over the side with Mr. Casey? "

" Where will that get you? " I asked.

He switched on his beaming smile. " Oh, come, come, Captain, Michelaides has a master's ticket in steam and sail, and four of our number are Aden boom and dhow sailors. You know what that means, surely? "

I did. Those boys can neither read nor write and to them a sextant is a telescope you can't see through, but they'd make a landfall dead to the yard anywhere in the vast triangle formed by Basra, Bombay, and Zanzibar by sight, smell, and an instinct they share with the albatross.

" But they're not so hot with engines," I mused, half to myself.

" Michelaides is," he cooed.

" Then why the devil do you want *us*? " I snapped.

" You'll have to refuel twice before we get there. Your papers show you cleared for various pearling-grounds here and in the Gulf, with permission to carry up to six Arab divers . . ."

That was it, of course. I was known in these ports. The *Peregrine*, under another skipper without proper transfer papers, would give rise to questions.

" How do I know we don't go over the side once we've refuelled for the last time? " I asked.

He spread his hands again. " Captain, you wound me. I'm a man of my word. Besides, I want to come back with you—all the way to Port Sudan. That is your guarantee, if you need one."

I tossed off the rest of my drink. " It's a deal," I said. " It seems I've got no option."

" You have," he chuckled, " but you'd be foolish to choose it—sharks terrify me." He rose, stretched, and yawned. " Lordy, lordy, but I'm tired."

" Me, too," I said. " But let's get this goat you've got on the wheel steering properly first. She's yawing like a drunken duck."

" By all means," he agreed, and then, as I went up the short companion-ladder to the wheelhouse, " You understand, Captain, no alterations off course without the consent of Michelaides. No—er—little tricksie-wicksies at all." He waved his finger waggishly. " Good night."

The cool night air blew the rest of the ache away. From my head, I mean. That which had sat at the back of my heart for four long years remained, and the sight of Perry disappearing into the tiny charthouse, which she seemed to have made her quarters, brought it up to a searing, stabbing blaze of pain. Damn her—damn her for what she had done to me.

The long haul to the south continued for seven days, then we

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swung north-east. We ran at economical speed to conserve fuel. I avoided Perry as much as possible. Sergei, Michelaides, and Ghazi bunked in the main saloon, the Arabs in the fo'csle, and Perry in the charthouse, leaving Casey and me to our own cabin.

Casey came to on the second day and thought he had been on a bat. I told him as much as was good for him. He merely shrugged, said, "Well, whatta you know?"—staggered off his bunk, and went looking for a drink. Soon I heard him joshing with the big Sudanese wrestler, El Pahlwan, who had blackjacked us both. There was no ill feeling on either side.

We refuelled at Perim and again at Aqqadan, round the bight from Aden. We had no trouble unless you count the discomfort of our three light-skinned passengers who had to hole up for four hours in the chain-locker each time. On the morning of the tenth day out, Sergei, Michelaides, and Perry went into a huddle over the charts. I wasn't asked.

It was that afternoon that it happened.

Sergei emerged at last from the conference, looking a bit preoccupied. He strolled aft, and as he passed me he winked and motioned with his head. Just then Michelaides came up the companion, and Sergei said something out of the corner of his mouth. That boy was a linguist. I think that incident gave me my first hunch that they weren't just one jolly band of brothers—and a sister. If I wanted further proof it came later, and fast.

It came in the form of yet another dhow. She lay off our port bow, sails backed and flapping in the fitful evening breeze. We had passed many dhows, but this one was different. She was different in that she had a gun on board. About a four-inch, I should say, from the column of spray the first round kicked up just across our bows.

She was also different in the hefty diesel she had, which, together with those beautiful, sinister triangular sails, gave her a turn of speed that almost matched our own. She was *not* different in that she had a crowd of people on her who could have made a blue-nosed Nova Scotian cod skipper look like a ham-fisted novice when it came to close handling in a narrow sea-way.

Also, she had the outer passage and blocked the fairway through the channel ahead. Anyhow, she caught us flat-footed and just ran us aboard before Casey had finished goggling out of the engine-room skylight.

The effect she had on our passengers was queer. Half of those I could see, as I rushed to take the wheel from El Pahlwan, were cheering, and the other half were running round like chickens in the shadow of a hawk. All I wanted to do was to prevent the *Peregrine* being sliced in half by those high galleon-like bows. She was wood and we were steel, but only thin steel, and she had the weight and speed of us until I could get into open water. I never did, though.

She luffed up, and somebody threw a grapnel aboard us. The grapnel was heavy and our brightwork suffered accordingly. We were gaffed like a salmon; Arabs were swarming aboard us, and a

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Schmeisser submachine-gun was rattling and spitting. Casey came up with a run and a roar, and his luck gave out just as he darted from the engine-room hatch and beaned one of the boarders with a monkey-wrench. Somebody shot him.

I had cut the engines on the wheelhouse controls to stop the grapnel tearing our top-hamper off us like the skin from a banana. Turning, I saw Casey just as he halted in the middle of his second swing. He looked comically surprised; then he slowly buckled at the knees and rolled sideways into the scuppers, and through them.

There was blood in the water by this time, lots of it. Blood means sharks in those seas. If I'd stopped to think for a moment I wouldn't have had the guts. But it was Casey and I liked him—and I thought I saw him move feebly as he hit the water between the two vessels. I went in after him and managed to get a handful of shirt and then the tail-end of a trailing rope from the dhow. I got the bight of it round him and because the rough timber of the dhow gave a better foothold than our own sleek sides, I went aboard her like a grasshopper out of a hot frying-pan. I hauled him in frantically.

He was lean but there was still two hundred pounds of him, so heaven knows how I hefted him out of the drink like a minnow. Anyhow, I did.

Casey was as limp as a punctured sack. Blood stained the front of his jeans and shirt, and a trickle ran from his mouth and mixed with the salt water on the filthy deck. He had fought his last joyous battle, and the police of a hundred ports could now earn their coffee and beans the easier for it.

I straightened up and a great weariness seemed to settle over me. I'd cussed him high, wide, and handsome over and over again. I'd even slugged him hard on occasion. He was lazy, the biggest liar that ever left the shores of Sydney harbour, and you couldn't leave a shot of liquor around unguarded.

Against that, he was loyal, good-humoured, and as generous as his Irish forebears always have been—and liquor was all he ever did help himself to. If his pay was six months in arrears he never grumbled and he'd have had the lights out of anybody who said a crab word about me in his hearing. In short, he was Casey.

The shooting had stopped now. Our Arabs were huddled together up in the bows, their hands held high and the whites of their eyes showing. El Pahlwan was slumped over the wheel and the glass of the wheelhouse windows was shattered. Michelaides seemed to have had it, too. He was hanging head down over the rails and as I watched he slipped down and through them. The sharks had arrived by this time.

Then I saw Ghazi. He was crouched behind the engine-room coaming, whimpering and salaaming. Two plug-uglies in cotton djellabas were hauling him to his feet and getting a rope on him. An old patriarchal figure in flowing robes on the poop above me was cursing them in vitriolic Arabic for being too gentle with him.

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Then, when one started in to throttle him, he cursed them again because he wanted him alive.

Ghazi was yelling his head off now and telling the old gentleman that he was his sun, moon, and stars and his favourite uncle all in one. It didn't seem to be doing him much good.

I wondered dully where Perry was. She was a tramp and I hated her, but she was a woman—and white. Not the best combination for these parts at a time like this.

Sergei came up through the cabin-scuttle like a fat slug and I waited to see what the old Arab's reactions would be.

They were surprising. He nearly burst a valve. The endearments his nephew was pouring out on the old Sultan were nothing to what the Sultan was calling Sergei. He was the Great Deliverer, the Protector of the Poor.

Sergei acknowledged it all with a beam and a modest bow. Perry followed him up on deck. Her face was a blank mask. Sergei bowed again, towards her this time, like a matinée idol sharing the applause with his leading lady, and the old Arab salaamed towards her, which is a thing that they don't do to a woman in these parts unless she's quite something.

I suppose Perry *was* quite something, and I had no difficulty in finding words for that something—they spewed out in four languages as I made for the rail to get at her.

One of the plug-uglies who was roping Ghazi got at me first, though—with a boat-stretcher across the head—and for the second time that trip I went out in a blaze of orange glory.

THE Sultan's nephew is finished with the ups and downs of life. He stopped mewing this morning, so they unhitched him from the wheel and cut his head off and stuck it on the top of the courtyard gatepost. Little Abdul the Damned squats in the shade with a sling-shot keeping off the vultures. I think the Sultan intends to get full value out of this warning to ambitious nephews.

I'm wondering what they're keeping me for; I wish I could be certain that the wheel is to be used solely for irrigational purposes.

Perry was in again last night, with a tray of bandages and bottles and other surgical odds and ends. I let her get right to the side of the plank bed before I stopped playing possum, then I jumped at her and nearly pulled my foot off as the chain ran out. She was too quick for me, though. She just stood back out of reach and looked at me as a horse-doctor looks at a sick and vicious animal—and I was both, very sick and very, very vicious.

"All right," she sighed. "I'll wait until you pass out again, and start moaning about your mother, me, and a composite blonde-brunette by the name of Babs-Honey-Peachie. I prefer you when you're spitting waterfront filth as you are now. You nauseate me less. But this is the only neck I've got."

"I'll be good," I promised. "Just come over here for a minute. I want to talk to you."

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She wasn't fooled, though. She went to the door and called in two of the guards and they held me down while she removed the old dressings from my head and replaced them with fresh ones. She fixed up my shins too—and the hell of it was that every fibre of my battered carcase except my brain and something the poets and crooners call one's heart, was grateful for her slick, skilled attention. Blurred memories emerging from the delirium of the last few weeks told me that she had done this before—often. I was sick enough to realize that she had probably saved my life, but I was still angry enough to strangle her with my bare hands, and she knew it.

"That ought to hold you for another twenty-four hours," she said as she pinned the last bandage into place. "Fortunately you've got nothing between your ears except concrete, or I'd be worried."

I was lying on my face with one guard sitting on the small of my back and the other holding my outstretched arms. I whispered Arabic endearments into the straw pillow—in the third person and inflected and with the last half syllables clipped. Cussing, real blinding cussing, is only in its infancy west of Suez. The older of the guards, shocked, asked permission to cut my reviling tongue out before Allah brought down a judgment on the place.

"On your heads be this man's life," she told them. "If he precedes you to hell your grandsons' grandsons will talk of the span of time it took you to die. On the beard of my father and the honour of my mother I swear it." She turned and looked at me when she reached the door. "You've probably got enough long-shore Arabic to follow part of that," she said as she lit a cigarette, "but don't let it give you ideas. With Michelaides dead, somebody's got to navigate that damned boat."

She laughed coolly and flicked her cigarette right across the cell at my face—which was silly of her, because when they had all gone, and the door at the end of the stone corridor had slammed, I smoked it down to the last shred. I wasn't proud and I was missing tobacco badly.

That was her last visit. The old hakim, or native doctor, took over after that. He had been trained in a rougher school than Perry, and he stank to high heaven—almost as badly as the goo he put on my head and shin and the herbal teas he gave me to drink. They seemed to have something though, because the nightly fever had ceased, and I found I could walk twice round the cell to the limit of my chain without buckling at the knees. I also found I was able to concentrate on things without my head going swimmy any more. Things like the hinge-pin in my leg-cuff, for instance.

That cuff and chain had been in use for a long time and was probably holding refractory citizens in check when my great-grandfather was still poaching rabbits back in the old country. Like most metal-work in those parts, it was made of soft iron, as also was the hand-wrought chain, but their workmanship was solid in those days and there was plenty of wear left in it still. All

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except in the hinge-pin, that is. Somebody had slipped up on his maintenance work there, because it had worn smooth and thin.

Metals are right up my street. Keeping a boat like the *Peregrine* out of dock, they've got to be. The cuff itself was an all-purpose fit—made, no doubt, to hold anything from a hefty Nubian slave to one of the lighter built ever-lovings from the harem. It was adjusted to the size of the client's ankle by the hinge-pin, which moved in an eccentric slot, and there its weakness lay. Half an hour's work with a file would have got the head of the pin down to such a size that it would have slipped easily back through the slot and the two halves of the cuff would have dropped off. I hadn't a file, though.

Barking my good shin on the window sill gave me the idea. It was hard rough sandstone and it had a sharp edge. I sat perched up there for two consecutive nights. It was hell keeping the thing running in the groove, and if I got off it I rubbed the skin from the now healing sore under the cuff. I reckon I put in hours of work sawing my leg back and forward in the darkness, holding the chain in my rolled-up shirt to prevent it clanking.

On the second night I was able to slip the pin out. I sat back on my bed, sweating and tired. I had so concentrated on the pin that I hadn't figured out anything in the nature of a next move. Quite obviously I would have to refix the cuff with the worn head of the pin downwards. They never inspected it. It was sufficient for the moment to know that I could get it off when I liked. That meant a lot.

The changing of the guard roused me. It was a rough and ready sort of drill that took place round about midnight as near as I could judge. There was only a sentry over the gate and another up the watch-tower who doubled as muezzin and called the faithful to prayer at dawn.

My guards were never changed. They both slept on mats at the end of the cell block, usually outside the locked door, although, when the khamsin was blowing and the dust was choking, they settled for the heat and came into the corridor. They seemed to have some working arrangement with the guards at the gate. A sentry kicked one or other of them in the ribs as he went out on relief, and provided he kicked hard enough, the guard so assaulted sat up, cursed in his beard, cleared his throat and spat noisily, and then, probably on the strength of Perry's threat, came along and had a squint at me by the dim light of a battered hurricane lamp. It was that which seemed to be happening tonight.

I heard the stirring, shuffling, and muttering outside and then the clip-clop of the guard's sandals on the stone floor of the corridor—and the whole plan came to me.

I was stretched out on the bed, groaning like a hippo with a belly-ache, when the guard looked through the peep-hole in the door. With my left hand I clutched my head; the other hand held the chain and the heavy cuff out of sight along my side. There was just enough slack in it to swing in a tight circle.

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The guard unlocked the heavy teak door and came in quickly. The flowing Bedouin head-dress didn't do a thing for him. From under lowered eyelids I gauged the distance to an inch and then swung. The cuff wrapped itself lovingly round his head while he was still three feet from the bed, and he was out like a light.

I listened carefully for a full minute. There was no break in the even snoring of the other guard at the end of the corridor. I bent over the prone figure and felt his pulse. In my judgment—and I was becoming quite an expert—it would be four or five hours before he came round again. If I could get out I would have that much leeway. But what then? We were, by my last reckoning, just four hundred miles north-east of Aden when we ran in with the dhow, and you could plus the distance we had come since then, though I had no means of judging what it was.

Anyway, four hundred, five hundred—what did it matter? There was nothing but sea and sand between us and Aden. For sand, you needed a camel, water, a knowledge of the route. No, the desert was out. So, it appeared, was the sea. Even if I could steal a dhow, I couldn't sail it single-handed. I could, of course, handle the *Peregrine* on my own and outstrip anything afloat in the Gulf, but the racket I should make getting her engines started up after their long rest would rouse the whole town, unless . . .

I thought of the dhows I had seen ghosting down the harbour. This place was wind-locked in the early hours. I had noticed from my window how Arab skippers sailing on the morning ebb used to drift with the tide until they were clear of the gap, maybe half a mile off shore. Only then would they get their big lateen sails up. The current seemed to keep them plumb in the middle of the fairway. Well, if they could do it, why not the *Peregrine*?

It was worth trying. There was plenty of fuel on board and, unless they'd looted the stores, plenty of tinned stuff. I had watered on the way round. Even if I couldn't make the whole passage to Aden, the main tanker routes were only fifty miles off shore—a highway as busy as the Quantock Pike.

On the other hand, I was weak and the fever was not far off. I weighed the pros and cons for a good five minutes before coming to my decision—and then, when I had, I worked fast.

I had the ab'a, djellaba, and q'arm—head-dress, cloak, and cords—off the guard within a minute flat. The general idea was to bind and gag him, but on closer inspection he was so completely out that it didn't seem necessary. I stood holding the garments and fingering my beard; by this time I had a full growth that a Caribbean pirate would have envied, and I was burnt as black as any Arab—blacker, for they cover their faces against the sun. The connection was obvious. In a matter of seconds I could have played the Mecca Holy Haj so far as appearances were concerned.

I flung the cloak around me in the approved style and drew the end of the ab'a across my face like a veil. Fresh air, particularly just before dawn, is rank poison to a Gulf Arab. I closed the door gently and turned the key. That key was a good foot long and, like

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the cuff and chain, of solid wrought iron. It would make as good a weapon as any if somebody got too curious. I took it with me. The sandals gave me a little trouble as I tiptoed down the passage, so I replaced them with my own rope-soled espadrilles which I had shoved into my belt. Nobody was going to look that close, I hoped.

The other guard was still dreaming noisily of harems and houris, wrapped like a cocoon in his robes, with a single-barrelled muzzle-loading smooth-bore beside him. It looked, and probably was, a hundred years old. Sometimes they went off when you pulled the trigger. If they did, it was curtains for all within a hundred yards who didn't duck in time. They were usually loaded with three ounces of black powder and as many bent nails as you could stuff down the barrel. I took that too.

I was out in the courtyard now. There was no moon, but my eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness in that cell. My next job was to get out of this dump and down to the beach. The sentry at the gate would be as fast asleep by now as this one. But the gate was shut, and the noise I'd make either trying to open it or climbing over would be certain to wake him.

Then I remembered little Abdul the Damned and his camel. They always came by the gate the gardeners used at the back of the building, and Abdul was frequently castigated for leaving it ajar. I tiptoed round. There was the gate and, since this was an Arab town and strictly "what is to be will be," nobody had thought of locking it after him.

Outside the gate a path led down to the beach and it crossed two ditches which served as sewers. I stumbled in both. When I reached the water's edge I not only looked my part.

It was when I got down on the sand and could see the black bulk of the *Peregrine* fifty yards out that I realized I hadn't given a thought to the tide. If it was making, I was sunk. In actual fact, it was just right—sheer sucker's luck—about an hour after the full and ebbing fast. I wondered whether they had put anybody aboard her as shipkeeper. I should have to reckon on that and act accordingly.

I hefted the iron key and the smooth-bore, but I couldn't swim with these and keep the gun dry.

The sucker's luck was holding. There was a small dhow dinghy beached nearby—leaky and unhandy, but light. The single scull was secured to the thwart with a becket. I shoved her off and paddled out gently, making a wide sweep, and coming up on the *Peregrine* from astern. Her own dinghy was riding at painter-length from her transom. I climbed into it and kicked the dhow dinghy adrift, then pulled in hand over hand on the painter. I came up to the rail without a graze and crept onto the whale-back.

There wasn't a sound on board. That meant that if there was a shipkeeper in charge, he was sleeping below. If he'd been on deck I'd have heard him by this time. Nothing outside the zoo snores like an Arab. Inch by inch I edged along to the companionway.

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I laid the smooth-bore down on the engine-room coaming and grasped the key tightly. If there was somebody on board, honours were going to be even right now.

I nearly tripped over the figure before I saw it. It was sleeping, but it wasn't snoring, and it was stretched on the deck by the chartroom. I froze; then, as I tried to focus on which end was head and which was feet, some instinct told me it wasn't an Arab. I crouched down closer, the key poised for a swing.

The key had swung about halfway in its arc when the figure stirred and muttered. Arabs don't mutter in English. But this was no Arab. It was Perry herself—sleeping the sleep of the unjust on my boat.

I sat back on my heels. What the hell did I do now? Drop her over the side and let her swim for it? It was only fifty yards to the beach and she could swim like a fish, but she'd raise the whole town before I had time to slip my cable. Cast her loose in the dinghy without oars? No good either. She'd still swim ashore.

There was only one thing for it. She had to come along for the ride, too.

I slipped off my ab'a and head-cords. I judged the distance between us to an inch and then I jumped. I yanked her half upright and swathed her head in the ab'a, wrapping its heavy folds round and round her eyes, mouth, and nose until she was nearly stifled and her struggles eased off accordingly. Then I got her over on her face, with her arms behind her, and trussed her up. I lugged her forward and pushed her down the forepeak. Then I took the ab'a off her and stumbled out in the darkness. I clamped the hatch down. She could squawk her head off now, but nobody would hear her.

They hadn't used the anchors, fortunately, but we were moored to a floating oil-drum with a chunk of two-inch manilla. That was fine. I didn't cast off, I just sawed through the rope that held the drum to the bottom. Paid out on the six-fathom manilla painter, the drum floated away like a drogue in front of us, and that kept our head pointing the same way as the tide was running. There was a dim light in a hut at the top of the cliff path and I fixed it over the alidade of the standard compass. As the light shifted slowly off the sights, it gave me a rough approximation of the speed at which we were drifting. I reckoned it was not quite a knot and a half. That was enough, with any sort of luck, to put me through the gap and half a mile off shore in an hour's time.

I lashed the wheel and went below to the engine-room and had a look round with a torch that Casey always kept in a rack above the bank of indicators. They hadn't taken any of the fuel out of her, and although things were in a mess compared with our own almost passionate standards of neatness, nobody seemed to have been interfering too much with the engines. If they had, I would soon know it once I tried to start her.

Diesels run as sweet as a nut when they *are* running, but they're

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the devil to start if you don't know them. I went back on deck.

We were smack in the middle of the fairway and drifting nicely. In fact we were right opposite the little white fort which I could see silhouetted against the stars. I took the wheel and gave her a few spokes either way. She answered sluggishly enough, which was only natural, but that was sufficient to keep her off the rocks. We were well in the gap now and the tide, funnelling through the narrow passage, was running proportionately faster. It was darned funny to think that half an hour ago I was lying on my back in that cell trying to figure out what next.

Later on, as the eastern horizon was paling a little, I reckoned it fairly safe to go below and start swinging her over. I primed the injectors just right, balanced and dead-centred everything; then, praying hard, cut in the starboard starter motor. The batteries were not too run down in spite of their long rest and the ham-handed efforts I had heard of somebody trying to start up. The fly-wheel went round merrily and I could hear the fuel being sucked in, but there wasn't a kick out of her apart from that. I cursed solidly, and then had a go at the port engine. The same thing happened there. She just wasn't having it—and by this time the batteries were beginning to weaken. I sat on the greasy foot-plates and I could have howled like a banshee. It was getting quite light now and pretty soon the town would be stirring. Somebody was bound to spot us—and that would be curtains.

Something stirred up on deck and a shadow blotted out the pale dawn light that was filtering through the skylight. I drew my breath in sharply and reached for the key in my belt. My first reaction was that Perry had got loose, but the hatch was steel and, once clamped, there was no way of opening it from the inside. I cursed myself for a dim-witted idiot for not having made a search below after roping Perry. Then I risked a peep round the end of the port engine block, and nearly passed out.

The face that looked down at me was thin, gaunt, and whiskery—but it was still unmistakably Casey.

Ever seen one of those comic films where a coloured boy thinks he sees a ghost and says, " Feet—do yo' duty "—but they won't? That's just how I felt—complete with shivers. I'm not superstitious, but I don't ever want to repeat that moment. My mouth worked but no words came.

Then the apparition spoke, or rather, it roared in a weak voice. Anyhow, it broke the spell.

It was Casey. Maybe fifty pounds lighter but still solid.

" Well, I'll be a something unmentionably vulgar," was a cleaned-up version of what he said. " The boss! "

" What the hell has been happening to these engines? " I asked him. I had to say something like that or make a fool of myself, I was so glad to see him.

" They just know it ain't pappy who's handlin' 'em," he told me. " Miss Perry has been trying her best to get 'em running

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because the Ay-rabs want the boat. I've been too weak to try and help. Say—where is she? If she catches me out of my bunk she'll bean me."

"She's down the forepeak," I answered. "And she's staying there."

"But, Geth," he howled, "you can't do that to her! Hell, I know you're sore at her, but—"

"Forget it," I said. "What's been going on? I thought you were dead."

"So did I," he assured me earnestly. "Boy, I thought a hangover after drinking ouzou was the worst thing that could happen to a bloke. It ain't. Bein' shot in the belly is. Wouldn't be here talkin' to you now if it hadn't been for Miss Perry. That gal's an angel."

"You don't say?" I said bitterly. "All right, I won't argue, but don't go trying to let her out or she'll be a dead duck, and you'll have nobody to nurse your next belly-ache. I mean it."

He looked worried and miserable. "You can't keep her down there in this heat," he said.

"I'll let her up when we get under way," I told him. "That's if we ever do."

"You never will with the compression taps open," he said.

I looked at them. They were closed all right. I had closed them myself. It was part of the drill. But even as I looked I could see something was wrong. The oil that had been sucked into the cylinders was leaking through them. The centre stems of the taps themselves had been removed. I looked at Casey, my jaw sagging.

"Given a good file and a hunk of half-inch brass piping, I'll fix that," he told me.

"How long will it take?" I asked.

"Two or three hours," he said. "Filing takes time."

"No good," I said wearily. "They'll have spotted us long before that."

"Seems like they have already," he said, and looked over his shoulder. "There's a dhow dinghy coming out with an outboard on it, and two—three—five guys. One of 'em looks like Sergei—"

"Listen, Casey," I said urgently, "I'm not going back to that cell, and I'm not going to be knocked off either—not without having a go for it first."

"You haven't a chance—they're carrying more guns than a horse-opera," he told me firmly. "We haven't got one on board, they took 'em all."

"We have. How far off are they now?"

"'Bout half a mile—and comin' fast."

I looked hard at him. "Just for the record, Casey," I said, "and so that I won't make too big a fool of myself in the showdown, whose side are you on?"

If he had got angry or indignant I might have doubted him. As it was, his face twitched as if I'd hit him in his sore belly, and

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then went blank. "Suppose you tell me what you want me to do, Geth," he said. "Just like you used to do. If you think there's any need for that sort of question, I'm ready to sign off just as soon as you can drop me. Until then, I'm on the articles."

"Sorry," I said—and meant it. It was a swine of a thing to say. "O.K. There's a smooth-bore right alongside you. Can you slide it to me without them seeing?"

"Sure," he said, and passed it down butt first.

"Right. Now listen to me. You woke up and found yourself adrift—savvy? There was nobody else aboard. The girl's gone. Start waving like you were darned glad to see them."

Casey never does things by halves. He waved and cheered.

"That's the ticket," I said. "Now, when they come alongside, take their line but make fast in such a way you can cast off quick. And listen—don't get between the boat and the after skylight. That's where the mulligatawny will be coming from—when things get hot."

The approaching outboard was making a racket that drowned all other sounds. I slipped back to the after skylight and risked a quick peep.

Sergei was sitting in the stern sheets, steering inexpertly. One Arab had a boat-hook, and another was getting ready to pass a line aboard. That left three of them, jammed together amidships.

They were all facing forward, away from me, and none of them had his rifle at the ready. I had a chance. Not a big one, but a chance.

Sergei called, "And what goes on, my excellent Casey?"

"Gee, boss," roared Casey above the now throttled engine, "am I glad to see you? Woke up and found us still fast to the buoy—but the damn buoy wasn't fast to anything else . . ."

"Where's Miss Perry?"

Casey played that one back. "Ain't she ashore?"

"I'm asking you."

"She 'ain't on board. I'm on my Tod Malone. That's what was worrying me most, and me as weak as a kitten."

Sergei had cut the motor now and the whole lot of them were standing in the boat holding onto our taffrail. They needed to, as the tide-rip was running through strongly and Casey was mutton-fisting the job of making fast. I came up through the skylight and the bell-mouth of the smooth-bore had them all covered.

"Hold it, just as you are," I told them, and repeated it in Arabic.

Five startled faces pivoted round towards me. Sergei was probably the only one of them who hadn't seen what those guns could do at that range, and even he wasn't taking chances. They all froze.

"You in the bows there," I said. "Let go with one hand and pass your rifle up—butt first. One trick, oh cross-eyed son of a something and an unnameable other, and all five pay for the sins of one." The rifle came up as directed.

Casey took it, snapped the breech open, examined the rounds in the magazine, snapped it shut again, and cocked it at them.

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" All right," I went on, " one at a time from the bows, pick 'em up—butt first—and drop them over the side."

They hated that. A rifle is like gold in those parts. An earhole full of bent nails is just iron anywhere, however, so they didn't argue. The guns went over with four sullen plops. Then I made them strip to the bare hide, and they liked that even less. When I was satisfied that they had no hand guns or knives, I had them aboard, one at a time, and we penned them in the chartroom. Then finally I invited Sergei to honour us. He was certainly taking it well, smiling cosily as if he were coming aboard for a lunch party. I covered him while Casey frisked him of his Luger, wallet, cigar case, and everything else portable; then, with acute satisfaction, I put on him the handcuffs that I had originally worn. I wished I'd been able to bring the leg-cuff along.

" Neat, Captain Straker, very, very neat," he chuckled, and then became serious. " Perry, where is she? " he asked anxiously.

" Shut your trap," I snarled, bundling him into the saloon.

" Straker, you've got a wireless on board. If you won't put me ashore, at least get a message through to Aden. We can't leave that girl ashore here! Straker, listen to me—"

I shoved him down the companionway, hard. I heard him yelling and kicking at the bulkhead as I went aft to the dinghy.

Perry must have heard him because she called out, " All right, Sergei. I'm aboard too."

He yelped with relief and went off into French which I couldn't follow except for the " chéries." So that was it, I thought bitterly. I must have been naïve, but I had never thought of them that way before. Damn it, he was old enough to be her father. The dirty little tramp.

That was the girl I'd fallen for. The girl whose picture I'd carried around in a locket next to my skin for years, until I met her again in Casablanca and knew her for what she was—an easy-money good-time Claribel, sleazing around the Continent, up to her neck in any dirty business that would turn a fast buck. Now French—now English—now American, and all as phoney. But somehow—somehow—I'd never thought of her as some crooked sugar-daddy's girl-friend. She'd always seemed too remote for that sort of thing. But what the heck had it to do with me? I knew what she was now, didn't I? But somehow I never thought . . .

I took a stanchion and stepped down into the dinghy and clouted a hole in the tank of the outboard with savage satisfaction. We were about five miles off shore and well south of the bay. I left them their oars—you can drift far and fast in the Gulf currents. Casey could get to work with his brass and file and when we'd got the *Peregrine* under way, I'd tow them a few miles more, give them a beaker of water and some chow, and turn them adrift. Perry and her elderly boy-friend were coming the whole way to Aden, every last bitter yard of it, where somebody whose job it was to know these things would be able to frame the right charges against them.

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Casey met me as I climbed back out of the dinghy. "I just shoved a mug of water down to Miss Perry," he began.

"Keep away from her, will you?" I told him coldly.

His eyes blazed. "O.K., O.K. You're the skipper. But suppose you do something about those ropes round her wrists."

"Get on with those compression-tap stems, Casey," I said. I thought it was going to be open mutiny for a moment, but he eventually turned away and went down into the engine-room and I set about clearing up some of the dunnage topsides . . . just something to do that needed no thinking.

Halfway through the morning I opened a couple of tins and brewed a pot of coffee. I took some down to Perry and, without a word, cut her hands loose. Casey had been right, her wrists were swollen, but when I started to chafe the circulation back she snatched her hands away.

"I'll leave the hatch open," I told her, "but if you come up on deck before I tell you, I'll clamp you down again."

"You won't get her started without my help," she said. "Suppose you do a deal with me?"

"I'd rather parley with a rattlesnake," I answered.

I left her and came back into the blazing sunlight. The sea was empty except for two dhows, but they were enough. Both seemed to have come from the harbour we had left and were standing away from the entrance, north and south.

They worried me. Even at that distance there was an air of purpose about them. If they hadn't come specifically to search for us, the one on the southerly course could hardly help but see us before long. We were hull down to her at the moment, but they would probably have a lookout up the tall foremast. I hurried along to the engine-room skylight and glanced down at Casey. He was hunched over the vice bench, filing away at a scrap of brass with grim concentration.

I said, "How long is that going to take?" and he grunted something I couldn't hear.

"Get one engine fixed up and started first," I told him. "There's a big dhow up-wind from us that I don't like the look of."

He just went on filing, so I lit a cigarette and then got the glasses out of the wheelhouse. What I saw through them worried me even more. The dhow had shifted course now and was bearing hard down on us and there was a man up in her weather shrouds. These boys don't waste a lookout just for navigational hazards. From up there he would have a better view of us than I had of them, glasses notwithstanding. She was more or less dead into the wind on her present tack, and would have to go about at least twice before she could close with us, but even so, it would not be very long before she was within rifle range. I dropped the glasses and started needling Casey through the skylight.

"Holy sailor," he howled, "will you go away and stop breathing down the back of my neck? I'm doin' the best I can, just as fast as I can."

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"Can I help?" I asked him.

"You can't do any filing. There's only one vice here. Go and make some more coffee, for Pete's sake."

That seemed as good an idea as any. I had reached the nail-biting stage by this time. There is a helplessness about a broken-down power boat that even a becalmed windjammer cannot match. That dhow was making up her leeway hand over fist, and there was no doubt that we were her pigeon. I cursed the false economy that had made me fit the *Peregrine* with only a short range transmitter. We had a rifle, a smooth-bore, and a Luger between us, with a total of eighteen rounds. The dhow would be crewed up to at least thirty, probably all armed . . .

I stopped short when I got to the small galley. There was a strong smell of coffee coming from it. I'd made some a little while before, but that was tinned stuff brewed over the paraffin lamp in the wheelhouse. This was the real McCoy—and it was mixed with the smell of frying bacon. Perry was cooking—cool and housewifely.

"I thought I told you to stay below," I began.

She hardly spared me a glance. "You've got the food here," she said. "Might as well use it while you have the chance. I stopped them looting the boat before. I don't think I'll be able to this time."

I went out quickly and examined the prisoners. They were all present and correct and still locked up where I had left them, but it gave me quite a turn. I went back to the galley.

"Get back to the forepeak," I ordered.

"Sure," she said, flicking bacon expertly onto four tin plates. "Mind if I finish this first? It won't make much difference in the long run. That dhow will be alongside in less than fifteen minutes. That is, unless you'd care to listen to reason." I helped myself to a mug of coffee. I was too dispirited to argue further.

"Turn Sergei loose and stop acting the Simon Legree and I'll tell you where the compression taps are," she went on.

I looked at her, slack-jawed. "You—you mean—you know where they are?"

"Of course. I took them off—it was the only way to stop them stealing your boat."

I gave up then; I turned and peered through the galley-scuttle. The dhow was now on the last tack. In a matter of minutes she would go about again, and then come bearing down on us. Even as I looked, there was a faint pop-pop-popping sound and the oil-smooth surface between us was scarred by a burst of machine-gun fire. They were still out of range, but they wouldn't stay that way for long. I turned back to her.

"I'll loose him," I said, "but it ends there. No more deals."

"All right," she agreed quietly. "Look under the footboards at the after end of the port propeller shaft. They're wrapped in cotton-waste."

I shot out of the galley and along to the engine-room. Casey

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was still filing. I slid over the reduction-gear casing and wrenched up the boards. The compression taps were there all right: all eight of them. I gathered them up and took them to Casey.

"Here," I gasped, "get these shipped, fast. I reckon we've got ten minutes at the most. I'll check the batteries and prime her."

Casey didn't even look a question at me. He grabbed a wrench and started to work. I didn't time him, but he must have set up an all-world record. Even so, it took him a good seven or eight minutes to get them in place on the starboard engine and by this time I could hear the men on the dhow yelling to us to line the rail—hands aloft—if we wished to stay alive and healthy.

The batteries were all but flat by now, so we shipped the crank handle into the fly-wheel to help them along. We swung until the knotted veins in our foreheads were near to bursting and my backbone felt like water. *Peregrine* coughed twice and then fell into that dull, sulky, oil-choked mood that usually meant a good half-hour wait before it was any good trying her again.

Sick and retching and hopeless, I fell back against the guard rail, giving the handle a last savage twist as I did so—a sort of final gesture of rage and desperation. It must have been that that did it. The sleeping devils in her iron guts jumped back at me and she backfired once, coughed again, took up uncertainly, and started to fire on two cylinders. Casey was at the throttle now—babying her and cursing her in turns. The third—then the fourth—took up, and he ran her slowly in neutral to warm her. He was right, of course, but his deliberation wasn't good for my nerves.

I sneaked a quick look out of the skylight and my bursting heart nearly stopped. The dhow hadn't gone about—she had gybed away with the wind and had then come up all-standing in a way that should have taken the sticks out of her but hadn't. Now she had saved half a leg and was coming straight for us, not fifty yards off. In another minute or so she would take us full amidships with the wind right astern of her, and with her draft and weight she would cut us in two.

I jumped for the clutch and shoved it in hard, yelling to Casey to open her up full. By all the rules it should have stalled her. She played ball though—I felt the starboard screw bite into the water, and nearly lost my foothold on the greasy plates as she started forward like a frightened horse. I didn't know how her helm was. I had to risk that.

"Stay with her, Casey!" I yelled. "Give her the lot—I'll go up to the wheel."

Actually the helm was hard a-port—and that helped the thrust of the starboard engine. The *Peregrine* was yawing off in a left-handed circle that took us on a parallel course with the dhow, which was now right on our beam, a bare ten yards away. All hell had broken loose on her. The Arabs were lining her side, yelling their heads off, and somebody was playing a Chicago sonata on the machine-gun. We were each dancing in the other's wake by now, which was lucky for me because it spoilt their aim.

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As I ran for the wheelhouse, bullets splintered the woodwork all around me, but I managed to reach it with an unpunctured hide.

Perry had got there ahead of me. I didn't stop to work out what her intention was. I just yanked her away from the wheel and shoved her down flat on the deck and stood over her. A chipped-off sliver from the door frame laid my cheek open from ear to chin but I didn't feel it. Knot for knot in that wind, the fast-sailing dhow had the legs of us on one engine, but we could manœuvre, which she couldn't. We could also run dead into the wind—and that we proceeded to do.

I held the wheel hard down until she had completed a tight circle, and then cut across the stern of the dhow. Their skipper tried to go about again and so put himself into a position to ram us as we passed but, superb sailor though he was, it was hopeless, and Casey had the other engine going by now so we stood away south at a smooth eighteen knots, shots bouncing off the surface and winging overhead like angry wasps.

I shifted my foot and Perry rose. That lass throve on rough treatment. She pushed her coppery hair out of her eyes with the back of an oil-grimed hand, and grinned.

" I'll keep my part of the bargain," I told her, not daring to look at her, " but don't get any mistaken ideas about things. When I have to sleep and Casey takes the wheel, you go back to the fore-peak and your boy-friend goes into irons. One fast ball from either of you and I'll drop you in your tracks."

I slipped the lashing over the wheel and went aft to the engine-room skylight. Casey was shaky but happy again. He was crooning to the engines and wiping them off with a piece of cotton-waste. The smooth-bore and the rifle we had kept back were leaning against the guard rail. I went down and got them and then dropped them over the side. Sergei's Luger was the only gun on board now, and that was stuck in my belt.

I unlocked the door and motioned the Arabs to the rail, one at a time. They had their eyes on the Luger and were looking glum. They brightened a bit when I pointed to the dinghy, which was bucking and straining against the painter in our wake. They even salaamed when I gave them a beaker of water and a bag of biscuit from the galley.

They were going to have a long hard row, as the dhow was now standing back for the port under both bellying lateens, a good five miles away, and hardly likely to stop for them even if they were seen. Arab sailors are cheap and expendable in those parts.

Casey came up just as I cast them loose. He was still looking happy but, underneath it, just about all in. The stench of burnt diesel oil had no doubt been sustaining him down below, but the fresh air knocked him for six. He just keeled over and passed out as he gained the deck.

I called to Perry. He was her patient and I needed to get back to the wheel. She fixed him up on blankets in the shade of the wheelhouse where the breeze could get at him. Looking down on

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them, I saw her haul his shirt up out of his pants and unwrap the blood-stained dressings from his belly.

Poor old Casey had certainly taken a belting, and I couldn't think how he had managed to swing that fly-wheel. Perry renewed the dressings and gave him a shot of morphine from our emergency chest; pretty soon he was sleeping. She sat back on her heels, then looked up and caught my eye.

"He'll do for now," she told me, "but he'll need to see a doctor before long. Anybody except Casey would be dead."

"Casey's tough," I muttered, probably in self-justification.

"But still human," she said. "Where are you making for?"

"Aden," I told her, without thinking, "but we'll be in the tanker lanes in a few hours. I'll flag one of them. The big ones carry a doctor."

She looked relieved. "I hope it won't be too long," she said. "Sergei is a diabetic and his insulin is running out."

"It would break my heart if that specimen croaked before they get a chance to hang him," I said.

"No doubt," she said. "In the meantime would you mind unshackling him and letting him up here? He's a sick man."

"Go ahead," I said, and threw her the key. "Only remember what I told you."

She took the key without another word and went below. Soon she reappeared, helping Sergei up the companion. I thought it might be an act until I got a close look at him. He was sick all right. He was green.

We sighted the first tanker just at dark. I got out the lamp and flashed her urgently. She sailed right on, although she couldn't help but see my signals. The same thing happened with another we saw later that night, and another just before dawn. Couldn't blame them, really. I don't pick up hitchers either, unless I can get a good look at them first.

By this time I was hanging on by my eyelashes—and they were weighted with lead. Perry seemed to get along without sleep.

Both Casey and Sergei had bad attacks during the night, but Perry worked right on looking after them, and I wondered afresh and with a great bitterness at the strange Jekyll-and-Hyde make-up that could produce a personality like this. She was a nurse to her fingertips, with all that ready selfless compassion that only the true nurse has. This was no act. What could have happened to make the girl I knew in the closing days of the war, the tramp she was now? Mixed up in dope-running—tied in with a thing like Sergei.

She had tried to dress the cut on my face, but I had shrugged her off and dropped my hand to the Luger. Oh Perry, Perry, Perry . . .

It must have been my general weakness, because at one stage I felt tears running down my cheeks unchecked and mixing with the dried blood. She turned up at my side then, in the dim light of the binnacle, and handed me yet another mug of black coffee, strong, scalding, and sweet. It pulled me together again.

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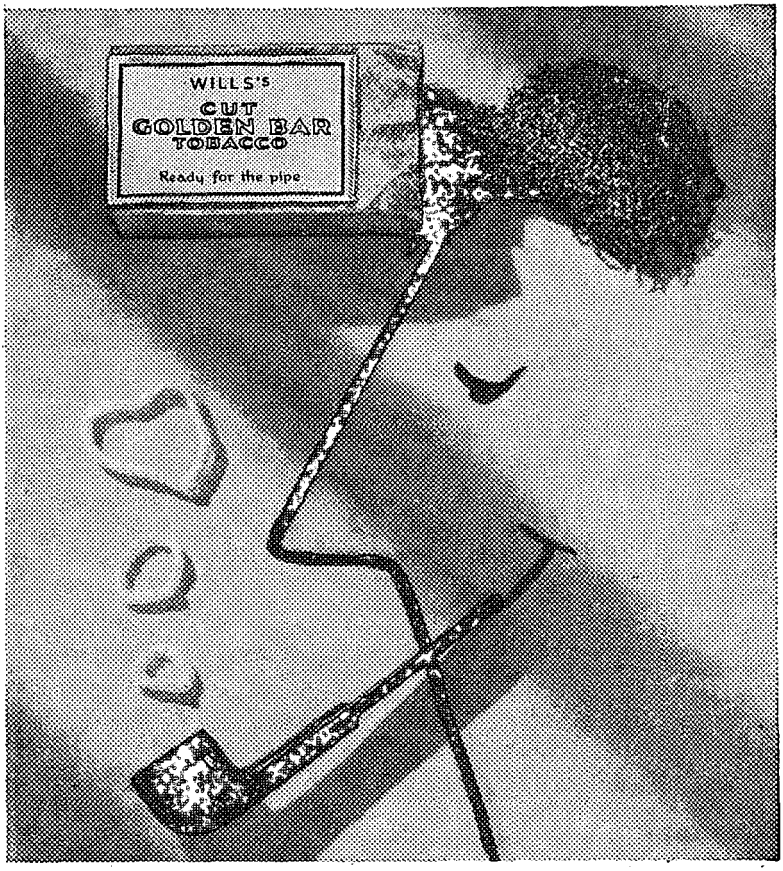

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"Why don't you rest?" she asked. "I can take the wheel."

I grunted something and motioned to the door for her to get out.

"Oh, don't be so silly," she said impatiently. "You've gone right out on your feet several times. I could have taken your gun just like that. Flag a ship, go to Aden—do what you like, but why kill yourself doing it the hard way?"

"It's my way," I told her. "And now get out." And she went without another word.

We saw the fourth ship just as the sun came up. It was right ahead of us. I kept on course for a full hour as her lights rose over the horizon and grew paler in the dawn, until at last she loomed above us and gave the two hoots on her siren that meant she was altering course to avoid us and would I please keep going as I was and get the hell out of it. I started flashing then—the international distress sign—and she hooted again, and we were near enough for me to hear her telegraph ring down to stop.

Things are a bit hazy after that. I remember arguing with the Swedish skipper. He did put his doctor aboard, however, and he did get busy with his radio, because after the doctor had looked over the two patients and shot a beady look or two in my direction they agreed to leave us to ourselves, but strongly advised us to get going on the same course until we were picked up. And picked up we were—by the Aden patrol boat about seven hours later.

I don't remember that part of it, though. By then I was stretched out with the other two, and Perry was at the wheel.

I came to three days later in the Military Hospital on Steamer Point, but it was another two before they would let me talk. In the meantime, they had lifted a small section of my skull bone and my head was bound up in bandages like a Sikh's pagree.

I was in a small private ward. There was a long streak of a major, with a dewlap like a spaniel, sitting in the bedside chair. He had a notebook on his knee and I asked him the time. The question was purely academic but he noted it down solemnly. He said, "Three o'clock, old boy," and rang for the nurse. I went to sleep again.

There was another major when I surfaced. He had a notebook, too, but he didn't look like a spaniel. I asked him about Casey. He told me Casey was doing fine and I went to sleep again.

The first major was there the next time and I stayed awake longer, and so it went on. I eventually stayed awake long enough to think out some sort of yarn to cover who I was and how I came to be belting down the Arabian coast with two very sick men and a girl, in a boat shot half full of holes. Something that was not too highly complicated and which would give Perry a chance to make a quick duck for it—or so I thought.

I was sick and weary with a weakness that left no room for hatred. I couldn't turn her in after all she had done. I just wanted her to go away and leave me to crawl some place and lick my wounds, and maybe even forget.

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I went to sleep again.

When I next woke I was ready to talk. It wasn't much of a story. It didn't seem to worry spaniel-puss though. He took it all down very solemnly and made polite and sympathetic clucking noises in the right places.

I told him I was on a pearling trip—that bit would check anyhow, if they had made inquiries. My Arabs had lit out. I'd got into a fight, then I'd picked up an old fat guy and a girl . . .

Spaniel-puss said that I wasn't to worry, so once again I drifted off, hoping to heaven that anything Casey had said that was different would be put down to the fact that I was a bit delirious after all I'd been through. I hadn't involved Perry too much, and if she was still as smart as I thought, she'd have jumped the plane or a boat to Djibouti by now.

She apparently wasn't smart, though. She came to see me on the third day with a very high-up military gent who was polite and deferential to her. I asked if I could speak to her alone for a minute and he said certainly and faded out. I told her what I had said and she asked me why. I couldn't answer her. I just turned and stared hard at a cracked bit of plaster on the wall.

Then she bent over me and I felt her lips cool on a bit of face that the bandage didn't cover. Tears were running warm over my cheeks again, and I didn't know whether they were hers or mine.

The high-up military gent returned as silently as he had gone—and with him was Sergei, looking very spruce. They must have had plenty of insulin in that hospital.

Perry said, "He's a lot better, Father," and I wondered dully how she came to have a British General for an old man and thought I was delirious once more. She wasn't talking to the General, though. She was talking to Sergei. Then I *knew* I was bats, so I went to sleep again. But this time it wasn't a devil-haunted half-coma; it was a deep sleep, and in it was an abiding sense of relief and deep, deep peace.

Casey has a bit of copper plating or something riveted over his belly and it seems to suit him fine. It cost me a lot to get him out of the Aden calaboose after his final blind the night before we sailed. It was my fault. I told him to beat it while Perry and I dined on the quiet end of the Club verandah, and she fitted in the loose bits of the jigsaw that made a complete picture of the whole crazy, tragic business.

She told me of Sergei, her White Russian father. Spy, if you like, or very gallant gentleman—it all depends how you look at it, from East or West. The governments of at least three Western Powers would—if they spoke of his work at all, which is unlikely—give him the highest commendation.

The brightest word in Sergei's lexicon is freedom, and for that he will go on fighting with the incomparable armoury which his cosmopolitan background has supplied. He will fight with any weapons and he is bound by no rules. He will fight until the

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chips go down in some back alley and somebody deals to him from a doctored pack, or his insulin gives out in a place where there is no more. He knows the stakes and the risks—and he accepts them as they are.

Perry told me of her childhood, of schools in half a dozen countries and temporary homes in half a dozen more. Brief intervals of comparative safety, until one day a phone rang or one night there was a soft tap at the door. She talked of those days in Canada at the end of the war and what they had meant to her.

She told me of her first job with her father—of the drug ring that was aimed at debauching the one group of young Moroccans who, at that time, if given a chance, could have steered their country to stability. There are, it would appear, other and dirtier currencies in political treachery than gold, and cocaine and hashish are but two of them. Together they had broken that ring: Sergei in the role of a crooked international lawyer on the make; she as a drug-runner from Marseilles.

That was to have been her only job and even in that she had merely been a stand-in, but she did superlatively well and, as I said, Sergei would fight with any weapons—so she had stayed on. Perhaps what I had said to her in the cells in Casablanca before she had been taken off to the women's prison at St. Vivienne had hardened her in her decision.

"That was the worst part of it," she told me. "Knowing that you thought—what you were *meant* to think—and not being able to tell you the truth."

"But, for God's sake, why didn't you?" I exploded.

"Thou shalt not speak. That is the first and only real commandment in secret work. I had learnt that before I ever started."

"How long were you in that gaol?"

"Only four months. When the gang were all roped in I was sprung quietly one night and I lived behind locked doors in back-street pensions and even in a convent until it was safe to go on another job . . . and then another, and another."

"But this crazy set-up we've just been through," I persisted. "How did it begin and where did it end, if it has ended?"

She looked seawards over the dark bay to where the lights of a big ocean liner were making a starry wake in the oily swell.

"It has ended," she said in a far-away voice. "The files will be neatly taped and put away now in three or four capitals. Everybody will be very pleased about it and they will insist on Sergei taking a long rest—perhaps even as long as three or four weeks—before his next job."

"But, damn it, there's more to it than that!"

"The Sultan," she went on, "about to sell out the oil concessions to the wrong people. His nephew, poor devil, ready to talk business, for a price, with some other people—also wrong. His price, his uncle's throne. We, Sergei and I, going along to fish in troubled waters for yet some other people—the right people. No plan—just playing it off the cuff as the cards fell."

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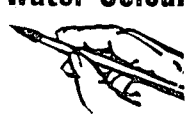

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"And how have they fallen?"

She shrugged. "Eminently satisfactorily—haven't I just told you? The nephew is dead. The Sultan is in trouble for the way in which he died. He will be deposed now by some Mandatory Power or other and the price of his neck will be a deal—with the right people."

"How nice," I said dryly. "Sergei *will* be pleased."

"Yes," she said flatly, "but at least the people will get decent government out of it—and in future that ghastly wheel will be used just for watering the garden. We never planned his death, though, nor that of Michelaides and the Arabs. Things just happened that way. They often do."

And then she was in my arms, and she was crying softly but as if her heart would break. "Oh Geth—my darling, my darling," she sobbed. "Take me away from it all. The ends may be so bright and shining but the means stink—they stink of blood and oil. I've seen that look in your eyes once before—the look of a man who knows the sea and the clean places and who is forced to look on the others, and doesn't understand. Oh Geth—take me away, take me away . . ."

We're chugging north again now, up the Red Sea, and the setting sun is square on our port beam and there's a breeze blowing that comes clear from Africa.

Casey is tiptoeing around looking both fatherly and coy, and I'd like to kick him over the side.

From the galley comes the smell of bacon and coffee. Nailed to the bulkhead in front of the cook are Perry's marriage lines and the special licence that made them possible.

They say that living dangerously gets in your blood like an itch that's always likely to break out again. If that is so, she'd better take a quick slant from time to time at the specially spliced rope's end I've hung beside the lines and the licence, because she's strictly domestic from now on. I, Geth Straker, have spoken the last word on the subject . . . or have I?

You never know with Perry—bless her.

© Berkely Mather 1958

★ ***A new Geth Straker adventure, Alpecchi Reach, by Berkely Mather, appears in next month's Argosy on sale March 7***

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 5, *Isolate*. 9, *Undulate*. 10, *Benares*. 11, *Ill omens*. 12, *Crease*. 13, *Retrospect*. 15, *Reasons*. 18, *Biped*. 19, *Synodic*. 23, *Rediscover*. 24, *Ostend*. 25, *Parental*. 26, *Ambages*. 27, *Blankets*. 28, *Skirret*.

Down. 1, *Ludicrous*. 2, *Adulation*. 3, *Old moon*. 4, *At any price*. 6, *She acted*. 7, *Loafers*. 8, *Treason*. 14, *Creditable*. 16, *Olive tree*. 17, *Stern list*. 18, *Bird's eye*. 20, *Yashmak*. 21, *Open air*. 22, *Screens*.

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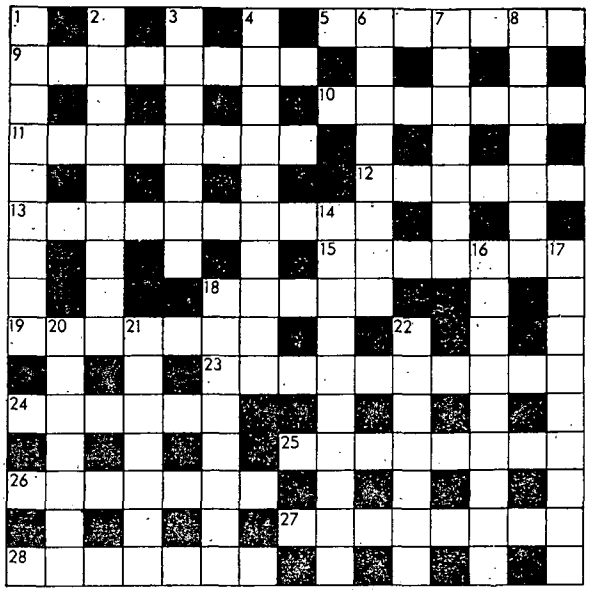
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

★



CLUES

Across

5 It's lonely when I'm so in arrears (7).

9 Rock Aunt in a duel (8).

10 City Kim visited (7).

11 Unhealthy outlook (3, 5).

12 Where the bowler folds up ! (6).

13 Crop tester's a thing of the past (10).

15 Logic in explanations (7).

18 Two-wheeled moped ? (5).

19 Like bishops meeting, or planets (7).

23 Regarding the lid you'll find you dropped an h (10).

24 Mine host ends in Belgium (6).

25 Pa and Ma's role is a lean part (8).

26 Carry same bag roundabout way (7).

27 " The rough male kiss of —— " (Rupert Brooke) (8).

28 It's a water parsnip (7).

Down

1 Ridiculous ! (9).

2 It's the death of virtue, Hannah More said (9).

3 Outmoded satellite ? (3, 4).

4 Money's no object (2, 3, 5).

6 " Whatsoe'er she wished, —— —— right " (Byron) (3, 5).

7 Ne'erdoweels in the bakery (7).

8 E.g. gunpowder plot (7).

14 Clever on tick ? Pretty good (10).

16 Are peace-pipes made from this ? (5, 4).

17 Ship's severe tilt backward (5, 4).

18 Winks at the early worm (5, 3).

20 Waterproof veiling ? (7).

21 Fresh on a pier (4, 3).

22 They're employed in protection or projection (7).

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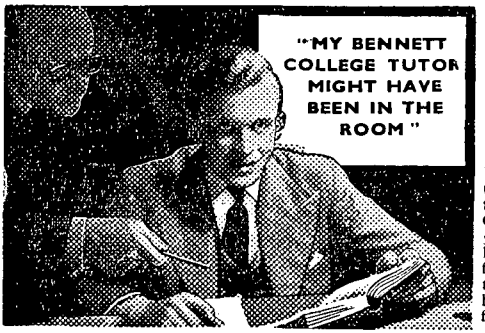

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